Postfeminist evangelicals : the construction of gender in the New Frontiers international churches

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Abstract

Building on the growing body of research on gender in contemporary Christianity, this thesis examines the social construction of gender in the British evangelical network of churches New Frontiers International (NFI). Adopting the sociological method of participant observation the main focus of the study is a local NFI congregation. This ethnographic material is augmented by interviews, observations at larger-scale public events and analysis of the organisation's publications. Following a literature review, the thesis develops by locating NFI in their social and religious context, identifying them as part of an expanding charismatic expression of evangelical Christianity previously labelled 'House Churches', now more typically known as 'New Churches'. The thesis is not only original in its study of gender in these New Churches but is also innovative in its conceptual approach to evangelical religion in Britain, namely the adoption of postfeminism as its theoretical framework. Postfeminism is defined as an amalgam of gender traditionalism (manifested in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century notion of separate spheres and a post-1970s backlash against feminism) and feminism within a late-modern context. Located in this framework, it is clear that NFI are substantially formed and informed by postfeminist discourse; this is the study's major finding. The main body of the thesis goes on to show how NFI socially constructs gender using the indices of congregational activities, marriage, masculinity and women's singleness. Two further significant findings emerge from this investigation. First, this evangelical network of churches can be most closely identified with the anti-feminist backlash strand of postfeminism. Second, while this assertion holds at the level of leadership and organisational ideology, in at least one local setting (as the ethnographic study demonstrates) NFI is less conservative and more feminist than the wider and national settings suggest. Conservative gender ideologies, therefore, despite their rhetoric, are sometimes weakened in social practice.

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Editorial Note

This study contains many passages of reported speech and direct quotation from fieldnotes and interviews. I clarify throughout which of these two sources are being used. As far as possible, passages of speech, particularly from interviews, are quoted verbatim, though grammatical sentence construction is employed for ease of reading. In a few cases some words are omitted; this is signalled by three consecutive dots. Where fieldnotes are concerned the words are my own unless recalled verbatim as indicated by quotation marks (e.g. Sarah asked the group to 'open your Bibles'). Square brackets (e.g. [laughs]) are used to indicate marked prosodic features or words added or changed for grammatical sense. The name and location of the congregation studied and its members have been changed to protect anonymity.

English spellings are used except when quoting from American-authored texts or in reference to particular terms and concepts generally referred to using American spellings: thus I use 'marginalise' rather than 'marginalize'. I refer to the 'reflexive modernization thesis' with a 'z', for example, because this has become standard international usage.

Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

Church attendance in Britain is decreasing; 11.7% of adults attended on an average Sunday in 1979, 9.9% in 1989 and 7.5% in 1998 (Brierley 2000: 27). Most Christian denominations are witnessing decline (Davie 1994; Bruce 1995, 2002; Brown 2001). Yet evangelical churchgoing is decreasing at a much slower rate, falling 3% between 1989 and 1998 in contrast to a 22% reduction overall. The 1998 English Church Attendance Survey put evangelical attendance at 1.4 million (Brierley 2000: 51). As a percentage of all church attendees, evangelicals have increased their share from 30% in 1989 to 37% in 1998; they now constitute the largest theological grouping among British churchgoers (surpassing Catholics at 26% and liberals at 11.5%) (Brierley 2000: 52).

Moreover, some evangelical groups are growing. Since the 1970s the charismatic evangelical churches formerly known collectively as the House Church or Restorationist movement, now called New Churches, have been heralded Protestantism's success story (Walker 1985b; Cotton 1995; Hewitt 1995). The rise of this movement was one impetus for my research. While New Church growth slowed from the mid 1980s (A. Walker 1998: 301-372), one network, New Frontiers International (NFI), has continued growing.

New Churches and evangelicals generally stand in complex relation to social processes in British society as a whole. They are alternately viewed as retreating to pre-modern supernaturalism; as modern, rational, structured and 'biblicist' (Bebbington 1989; Maitland 1992); or as enthusiastic reflectors of late or postmodern experientialism and individualism. Gender relations within Britain and British evangelicalism are comparably complex. The last two centuries have witnessed major changes in gender patterns as well as major continuities. Gender has been an important arena of social relations, from the ideology and partial practice of 'separate spheres' from late eighteenth-century industrial modernity to the feminist challenges of the first- and second-wave women's movements; from backlash rejections of feminism to new forms of behaviour necessitated by two world wars and new work patterns in a late-modern, 'postfeminist' society.

Evangelicals have harnessed their religious, economic, educational, literary and social resources in negotiation with their gendered culture, sometimes rejecting, sometimes affirming aspects of that culture. New Churches' initial approach to gender contributed to their distinctiveness. At their 1970s foundation most Restorationist groups aligned themselves in opposition to the sexual counter-culture and second-wave feminism, supporting strongly conservative, gender-differentiated theology and practices. Other New Church networks later took a different stance, proclaiming gender equality as part of the call to Christian freedom. For many evangelicals, perhaps most, gender is a less settled issue. Some three decades since the New Churches began, the picture remains complex.

I began my research with the aim of comparing how gender is 'understood and practiced' in two New Church networks using ethnographic methods. Knowing that evangelicals' gender beliefs and practices were not uniform, studying one taking a conservative stance (NFI) and one an egalitarian stance (Pioneer) would enable me to uncover how gender operated in these new forms of Christianity. Having visited a number of congregations, I abandoned this ambitious project in favour of an in-depth ethnographic study of one. On the basis of numerical significance (NFI is by far the largest and most clearly growing New Church network) I opted for NFI and a local congregation I gave the pseudonym 'Westside'.

Although feminism has penetrated theology, its inroads into the sociological study of contemporary religion remain small in Britain (Walter & Davie 1998: 640-641). Feminist sociologists and interdisciplinarians seek to interrogate the gendered nature of all forms of social life, but their investigation of contemporary religion is comparatively insubstantial in the British (as opposed to the American) context. Religion remains marginal within women's studies and feminist sociology (Beattie 1999; King 1995a: 219-220; Magee 1995; Woodhead 2002; see King 1995b's review).[1] Using feminist frameworks, this thesis adds to this presently small area.

I argue elsewhere (Aune 2004) that gender is pertinent to the study of contemporary religion for three reasons. First, since the feminist challenge to knowledge particularly since the 1970s, gender has become a significant area of academic enquiry. This has enabled, within sociology, revelation of a prevalent normalisation of gender inequalities; it has

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[1] In the field of Christianity, studies cited later in this chapter are exceptions, as are Pryce 1998, Sharp 1998, Porter 1999, Thorne 1999, Walsh 2001, Jeffels 2002, Eldred 2002, Slee 2003.

resulted in the creation of women's and gender studies courses; it has issued epistemological challenges I will later address; and it has brought new attention to so-called 'personal' or 'domestic' issues such as housework, intimate relationships and domestic violence and their structural relationship with the wider society. As an important area of personal participation and/or public or symbolic significance, the place of gender within religion deserves similar interrogation. Second, as sociologists of gender have shown, gender is a significant means by which social identities are established and, arising from this, a site of social conflict. This is true in society as a whole and in religious congregations, as debates over women's ordination in the Church of England have in recent decades demonstrated. Third, gender is important because a relationship frequently exists between congregational membership and gender: almost every congregation has more female than male members. In Britain, figures suggest that the gender disparity has recently increased. In 1979, 55% of church members were women; this had risen to 58% in 1989 (Brierley 1991: 24) and in 2001 to between 61% (Wraight 2001: 21) and 65% (Churches Information for Mission 2001: 9).

Existing literature on contemporary evangelicals and gender

Four principal models currently operate in the feminist and sociological study of evangelicalism and gender and can be drawn upon to formulate my own framework. For want of other terminology, I have called these approaches *conservative-egalitarian*, *plural*, *symbolic traditionalism and pragmatic egalitarianism* and *empowerment/oppression or structure/agency*.

Four existing models

The conservative-egalitarian model

The concept of a conservative-egalitarian divide or spectrum is employed variously to contend that evangelicals: hold out a conservative approach to gender in a society that favours greater egalitarianism; are polarised with regard to gender, either fervently favouring traditional, differentiated approaches or feminist, flexible ones; or are not polarised but move

between a conservative, hierarchical or what might be called 'closed' approach to gender and a fluid, democratic, egalitarian, open approach.

Several early studies portray evangelical gender patterns as conservative, in contrast to liberal and feminist views in mainstream society. In her ethnographic study Nancy Ammerman (1987) explains how the fundamentalist 'Southside Gospel Church' (pseudonym) employs a conservative understanding of marriage to enforce boundaries between the church and 'the world.' Adhering to male authority and female submission within lifelong marriages (fundamentalists believe divorce is wrong) has, believers claim, kept their marriages together. Yet Ammerman (1987: 146) demonstrates that the impossibility of entire separation from society creates a conflict for fundamentalists who 'must find ways to live with the tension between Fundamentalist norms for family structure and modern norms of individuality and equality'. Angela Aidala (1985: 294) claims that Christian New Religious Movements adhere to 'biblically-based understandings of patriarchy'. In this model men, to different degrees, take leadership, breadwinner roles, while women submit to men and do most of the childcare. Furthermore, evangelical gender conservatism is said to represent a 'backlash' against feminism; like Randall Balmer's (1994) reading of American evangelicalism ('fundamentalism' is his term), evangelicals are interpreted as trying to restore a nineteenth-century ideal of feminine domesticity in and against a modern, non-religious culture that has rejected that ideal in favour of egalitarianism (see also Rose 1987). My thesis challenges these contentions that evangelicals are simply gender conservatives and explores evangelicals' alliances with feminist ideas.

Others consider evangelicals polarised regarding gender. One observation gained from in-depth study of congregations is the existence of 'congregations in conflict' (Becker 1999). As Roof (1978), Wuthnow (1988), Ammerman (1990), Hunter (1991), Becker (1999) and Ruether (2001: 149-155) have shown in the US, denominations (and sometimes congregations) can be sites of theological, social and organisational conflict; this is often viewed as a conservative-egalitarian conflict. For the congregations Penny Edgell Becker (1999) studied, gender and sexual issues were the third most common causes of conflict. Robert Wuthnow (1988) argues that as a result of American second-wave feminism, churchgoers' previously less thought-out views about women's roles became polarised into two camps, one advocating and one opposing gender equality in church. Advocates of equality tended to be liberal Christians; opponents were often evangelical. The opposition

conservative Christians posed was strengthened through political links: in America, evangelical opponents of women's ordination often supported right-wing policies and mobilised themselves in the political arena, campaigning against the Equal Rights Amendment for example (Diamond 1989: 83-110, 1998: 127-130).

Ammerman (1990: 93) shows how conflict manifested itself in the early 1980s in the American Southern Baptist Convention, where women's role was a key issue of contention. Women ministers became 'symbolic of the division facing the convention'. They were pointed to alternately by fundamentalists as exemplifying defiance to the Bible, and by liberals as symbolising openness and tolerance. Mark Chaves (1997: 112) also documents the relationship between biblical literalism and gender inequality, adding that the American denominations most occupied in a conflict between fundamentalism and liberal modernism are most opposed to women's ordination.

In his ethnographic study of a congregation from the British Restorationist network Covenant Ministries, Stephen Briers reveals the congregation's ambiguous relationship with modernity.[2] While Covenant Ministries' ideology is intentionally closed, in that it 'has offered itself as an antidote to the modern world,' it has unknowingly 'simultaneously offer[ed] a spiritual affirmation of [the modern world's] underlying values' (Briers 1993: 208). Briers shows how Covenant Ministries idealise the nuclear family with distinctly separate gender roles to differentiate them from perceived feminist and sexual liberationist emphases within society. Yet in doing so Covenant Ministries sanctify a family set-up that is more a modern western construct than a biblical norm. Briers differs from Ammerman (1987), who sees 'modern norms' as largely individualistic and egalitarian; Briers considers them largely conservative. Nevertheless, their argument that evangelical congregations hold in tension a closed ideology of gender that is moderated in practice because it is lived out in a society from which it differs, is similar. Briers' observation about the inability for congregations to escape societal influence is pertinent to my central argument.

Elaine Foster (1992) provides a British variation of the conservative-egalitarian model, suggesting that British black churches can be pictured as two pyramids. The first pyramid 'is inverted and represents the "female" Church. In this pyramid lies the spirituality, the life-giving and life-sustaining nature of the Church.' The second 'is the upright pyramid.

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[2] Notwithstanding debates about how far the West has moved towards late or postmodernity.

It represents the Church in all its patriarchal and hierarchical glory, and contains all leadership, juridical and priestly roles' (1992: 47).

However, ethnographic studies moderate, even contradict, 'culture wars' theses. Ammerman cautions against assuming conservative-liberal polarisation (1997: 356-358); her work on the Southern Baptists (1990) revealed as much a conservative-liberal spectrum as polarisation. Similarly, Becker (1999: 127-130, 177-178) rejects the view that conflict over gender roles reveals a wide split between 'conservatives' and 'liberals', arguing that the 'liberal' stance on gender equality espoused by those in one congregation she observed derived not from societal norms but from evangelical feminist hermeneutics. Moreover, as most research on gender in congregations shows, conservative congregations are not uniformly so, and often contain elements that militate against gender conservatism, either diluting it or producing transformations favourable to women. John Bartkowski's (2001) research into evangelical marriage outlines evangelicals' actively negotiated incorporation and reconstruction of both progressive and traditionalist gender discourses and practices. He finds also that essentialist rhetoric is tempered in various ways in lived experience, and that class, rather than simply religious adherence, plays a part in shaping believers' gender constructions. In an argument partly resembling mine, Sally Gallagher (2003) also notes that most evangelicals adopt a mix-'n'-match approach to two gender ideologies: conservative and egalitarian. If, as Gallagher puts it, the theological histories of competing gender ideals can be conceptualised as 'cultural tool kits', 'ordinary' evangelicals dip into them according to need. They 'encounter ideas of partnership, headship, and authority not as a choice between "either-or" but as a matter of balancing "both-and"' (Gallagher 2003: 179-180).

Notwithstanding these hesitations about the gender polarisation thesis, it remains true that, in British Christianity, gender can be a site of social conflict. This conflict can occur between or within denominations and congregations. Although insufficient qualitative research has been conducted into gender in British congregations, studies by Briers (1993), Charman (1995) and Aune (1998) identify conflict regarding gender issues in the congregations they observed.

Plural typologies

Increasing numbers of sociologists hold to the conservative-egalitarian model in discerning tensions between closed and open attitudes to gender, but moderate it and provide typologies of three or four models of gender. Such models are found not only in work on evangelical Christianity. Helsinger et al. (1983) for example delineate four ideologies of womanhood in Victorian England. Similarly, in her work on right-wing women, Andrea Dworkin (1983: 202-215) argues that gender conservatism, which she calls 'antifeminism', is articulated through three social models: 'separate-but-equal' (men and women share a common humanity and are of equal worth but function in separate spheres – men in the workplace and women in the home); 'woman-superior' (women are more spiritual and pure); and 'male-dominant' (women need men as benevolent, protective authority figures).

Lori Beaman's (1999) interview research among almost a hundred American evangelical women takes this plural approach. Beaman delineates three types of evangelical woman: traditionalist, feminist evangelical and moderate. Traditionalists 'object to women's participation in the paid labor force, interpret biblical passages more literally, and adhere to a traditional division of labor between men and women'. Feminist evangelicals 'reject the rhetoric of submission and call for an articulation of male-female relations as partnerships. They embrace women's equality and call for increased roles for women within church hierarchies.' Moderates, the largest group, 'accept biblical teaching on submission and headship but live and interpret them as partnership and equality within their own marital relationships. They accept liberal feminist notions of equality quite readily but are cautious about extremism in any form' (Beaman 1999: 4). Beaman's work also fits my empowerment/oppression category below.

Brenda Brasher adapts Susan Palmer's (1993, 1994) work. Palmer found three approaches to gender in the New Religious Movements she studied: 'sex complementarity', 'sex polarity' and 'sex unity'. Brasher identifies three gender patterns in the two fundamentalist evangelical congregations she studied from the Calvary Chapel and Hope Chapel movements: sexual polarity, sexual dominance and sexual unity. The first posits that 'there are two sexes, distinct from and generally unhelpful to each other'; the second that 'there are two sexes, and that one – generally the male – is superior to the other'; and the third that 'there are two sexes, but that the two are equal' (Brasher 1998: 59). Palmer finds that each New Religious Movement tends to adhere to one of her three models. However, Brasher (1998: 60) observed all three at work in each congregation she studied, 'with shifts

occurring from one to the other according to the aspect of religious life involved': 'In intracongregational gendered ministries, sexual polarity prevailed. In overall congregational authority, sexual dominance took precedence. In normative religious values, sexual unity was present'. Dworkin (1983: 215) makes a similar observation about 'antifeminist' models of gender:

> The three social models of antifeminism – the separate-but-equal model, the woman-superior model, and the male-dominant model – are not inimical to one another. They mix and match with perfect ease, …Most people, whatever their political convictions, seem to believe parts of each model, the pieces adding up to a whole view.[3]

Donna Luff (1996: 195-197), studying British women (many evangelical) involved in moral lobby movements, evaluates Dworkin's models. She finds that 'all the women accepted the "equal but different" model, whilst there was considerable variation in opinion about the "woman as superior" and "male dominant" models'. Moreover, 'even on the idea of equal but different, however, there was a variation in what practical and personal significance this held for individual women'. Despite frequent opposition to the term and concept of feminism, moral lobby women were in greater agreement with feminist perspectives (generally of the liberal form) than they admitted.

Toulis (1997: 272) considers the negotiation of gender and Jamaican ethnic identity among Pentecostalists in a British New Testament Church of God congregation, showing that three different models of identity converge:

> there are three categories of the person in the church: 'men,' 'women' and 'saints'. The construction of gendered persons ('men' and 'women') and the construction of persons as undifferentiated saints employs two different models: one model rests upon both the 'model for' the family provided by patriarchal 'Christian marriage' and the 'model of' the practical range in African-Caribbean kinship and domestic organization, while the other model is based on the 'model for' 'Christian identity'.

Each factor – Afro-Caribbean and patriarchal Christian concepts of gender and a belief that Christian identity is genderless – moderates the others to produce gender identities unique to Afro-Caribbean Pentecostalism.

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[3] Her extension of this to cover 'most people' rather than just antifeminists is questionable.

Symbolic traditionalism and pragmatic egalitarianism

Sally Gallagher and Christian Smith's (1999) in-depth interviews with 265 American evangelicals reveal a disjunction between ideology and practice: evangelicals possess relatively traditional gender ideologies but pushed by cultural and economic shifts to dual wage-earning what emerges is a social practice in which women and men share wage-earning, parenting and household decision-making. Male leadership or 'headship' is symbolic. Evangelicals use rhetoric of male leadership in the home to encourage men's involvement (practical, spiritual and emotional) with their families. But in practice husbands and wives share paid employment, domestic tasks and childcare; they are 'pragmatic egalitarians'.

While Gallagher's (2003) research, a cross-denominational survey of 2000 American evangelicals and 175 semi-structured interviews with individuals depicts the curious amalgam of conservative and egalitarian attitudes to gender that, I will argue, may be called postfeminist, one of her main observations is of a disjunction between ideology and practice. What people do is not always the same as what they believe; neither, as Malinowski famously said, does what people do always correspond to what they say they do.[4]

Empowerment/oppression or structure/agency

Other studies view women's positions in evangelicalism in terms of empowerment (or lack of it) and the relationship between structure and agency. They pay particular attention to the fact that, although women may be disempowered by evangelicals' emphasis on female submission, they may nevertheless gain power through (or despite) submission: power to influence their husbands and speak in God's name. This empowerment/oppression lens was no doubt influenced by second-wave feminist concerns about gendered power relations.

Mary McClintock Fulkerson (1994) seeks dialogue between feminist theology and the sociology of religion. Influenced by poststructuralism, Fulkerson applies a feminist theological analysis to the discourses of three groups of American Christian women: Presbyterians, Pentecostal ministers and feminist academic theologians. Analysing their

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[4] I could not locate the source of Malinowski's comment

understanding of scripture, she shows that through their different readings they construct themselves as resisters of oppression. Fulkerson calls on feminist theologians to accept this variety of strategies and resist perceiving women from less obviously feminist Christian traditions simply as the 'other'. R. Marie Griffith (1997) spent two years observing the evangelical charismatic Women's Aglow movement, a large American (now worldwide) women's prayer fellowship. She combines ethnographic observation with historical work and textual analysis to show the need to 'see beyond simple antitheses of liberation versus oppression in Aglow women's narratives' (Griffith 1997: 211). Women employ notions of submission, secrecy, openness, intimacy, healing and transformation, which they enact through prayer and the sharing of personal stories, in order to challenge what they regard as societal wrongs and, ultimately, to 'reinvent' and 'make room for' themselves (Griffith 1997: 213). By 'subtly deciphering the doctrine of female submission to male authority' (Griffith 1997: book jacket), evangelical women can gain power. Power is central also to Brasher's (1998) thesis. Brasher shows that even in fundamentalist forms of Christianity which teach female submission, women gain power through establishing 'female enclaves' known as 'women's ministries' which operate parallel to the wider congregation. In these enclaves women take all the leadership and preaching roles and cooperate in transforming each other's lives. Lastly, Beaman (1999: 142) argues that though evangelical women 'are empowered through their beliefs and through their connectedness to their faith communities' and 'live submission as partnership in their everyday lives', they are structurally constrained through exclusion from leadership roles and financial decision-making at church. The 'story' of their lives researchers tell 'becomes one about the ways in which evangelical women exercise agency within a religious context that promotes patriarchal relations'.

Elizabeth Brusco's (1995, 1997) investigation of the high rates of female participation in evangelical congregations in Columbia can be described as using an empowerment model. She understands women's conversions and congregational adherence as a means of raising their status. In contrast to the 'machismo' of Columbian society, men who can be persuaded (often by their wives) to convert are required by evangelicalism's ascetic standards to reform their behaviour. Instead of gambling or drinking away their wages, they bring their full wage into the household; in place of a violent attitude to their wives and extra-marital affairs they become caring spouses.

In the UK, Sandra Baillie (2002) uses quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews) methods to discover whether women are 'imprisoned or empowered' by Northern Irish evangelicalism. She concludes that while women in the role of homemaker may be empowered by conservative evangelical idealisation of women's role in the home, other women seeking public roles in society and the church may be imprisoned by this attitude, as are women whose ambitions have been limited by the constraints evangelicals place on their expected activities. However she also notes that Northern Irish evangelicals' views on gender equality are polarised. A roughly equal number approve and disapprove of female church leaders; less than a tenth are undecided. Fran Porter's (2002) similarly cross-denominational interview-based study of seventy women in different Northern Irish congregations demonstrates the significant, often unrecognised, contribution women make to Northern Irish community, church and political life. Church structures often exclude women from positions of leadership, and Porter's task is to show how evangelical women negotiate their lives in such a context.

Paul Charman's work, within which women are a minor concern, discusses New Church life in terms of empowerment and enfeeblement. Covert ethnographic observation in the three New Church congregations revealed that women's congregational roles were limited by a theology of male authority in marriage, church and society. This restriction means 'empowerment is possible in men to a greater extent than in women who appear to meet a "threshold" earlier because they are undervalued by an expectation that they will comply with traditional female roles' (Charman 1995: 382).

Myfanwy Franks (2001) compares the situation of women in British Islamic and Christian revivalist movements, her Christianity section involving participant observation of the evangelical charismatic Jesus Fellowship community and a student meeting of a Covenant Ministries congregation. Franks focuses on four themes: marriage and female submission, rights and responsibilities, modesty and dress codes and empowerment. She concludes that revivalist women adhere to a range of models of gender relations, rather than just the stereotypical conservative pattern. Women interpret their religious choices – which Franks views through rational choice theory – as empowering. Those in movements adhering to conservative gender roles do not regard the limitations on women's roles as restrictive but as providing divinely ordained, effective structures for human (notably women's) flourishing. While a few feminist revivalist women are willing to challenge religious authorities, their

challenge is reformist rather than radical: 'In none of these instances along the continuum of degrees of submission to God and sometimes to men are they contesting patriarchal relations head on' (Franks 2001: 185).

An alternative model: postfeminism

Although it is feasible to understand an evangelical congregation's gender manifestations through the frameworks above (many of which, as I have illustrated, are already used in combination) I suggest the need for another model, that of *postfeminism*. Chapter 3 delineates this framework, defining postfeminism as an amalgam of gender traditionalism and feminism enacted within a late-modern context. Chapters 4 to 8 analyse understandings and practices of gender in the congregational setting, marriage, masculinity and women's singleness with reference to postfeminism. It is necessary first to provide a description of NFI (Chapter 1) and explain my methodological approach (Chapter 2).

Chapter 1

New Frontiers International in Social and Religious Context

Introduction

The churches known collectively as New Frontiers International (NFI) are an evangelical Christian network that emerged during the 1970s as part of what was called the House Church movement (now referred to more commonly as New Churches). This chapter introduces and sets them in their social and religious context, first in relation to evangelicalism as a whole and then to the House Church movement.

Evangelicalism in Britain: definitions and relevant developments

The term 'evangelical' derives from the Greek 'euangelion', meaning 'good news'. David Bebbington's (1989: 3) paradigmatic definition links evangelicalism to four qualities:

> *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

James Davison Hunter (1983: 7) describes evangelicals doctrinally and behaviourally. Doctrinally, evangelicals adhere to: '(1) the belief that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God,[5] (2) the belief in the divinity of Christ, and (3) the belief in the efficacy of Christ's life,

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[5] The theory of biblical inerrancy 'holds that the original writings…are free of error in all about which they speak, matters scientific and historical as well as theological and moral' (Fackre 2001: 66). Evangelicals began speaking about inerrancy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Fackre 2001: 66); it crystalised into a full-blown doctrine at Princeton Theological Seminary in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Marsden 1980: 109-123; Noll 1988). Various interpretations of inerrancy exist among evangelicals, some more liberal than others (Fackre 2001).

death, and physical resurrection for the salvation of the human soul.' Behaviourally, evangelicals are characterised by 'an individuated and experiential orientation toward spiritual salvation and religiosity in general and by the conviction of the necessity of actively attempting to proselytize all nonbelievers to the tenets of the Evangelical belief system'.

A few authors (particularly self-identified evangelicals, e.g. McGrath 1994: 11-18; Murray 2000: 1) date the movement known today as evangelicalism from the sixteenth-century Reformation (in particular the wing associated with Martin Luther) and seventeenth-century Puritanism and Pietism (e.g. Ward 1992). However, the consensus is that evangelicalism developed from the Great Awakening, the Protestant revivalist movement of the late 1730s and early 1740s. The Great Awakening was associated in North America with Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield and in Britain with Whitefield and John Wesley, whose activist and conversionist emphasis on spreading the gospel, motivated by belief in the authority of the Bible and the centrality of the cross, came to mark out evangelicalism (Bebbington 1989: 20-50; Hilborn 1997: 63-5; Lambert 1999).

Influenced by Enlightenment rationalism and subsequently by the more emotional Romanticism, which inspired the late nineteenth-century Holiness movement, evangelicalism experienced a fundamentalist-liberal divide in the 1920s.[6] Twentieth-century British evangelicalism has seen two important developments: the Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal movements.

The Holiness movement, in the form of the Keswick Conventions that began in 1875, was an important precursor to Pentecostalism in Britain. So too were the 1904-5 Welsh and 1906-8 Azuza Street (Los Angeles) revivals (Kay 2000: 1-36). Like the Holiness movement, Pentecostalists advocated a second religious experience subsequent to conversion. Pentecostalists usually expected this 'second blessing' or 'baptism of the Holy Spirit' to be accompanied by what was called 'the gift of tongues', unlearned languages or non-rational

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[6] On the development of fundamentalism, see Marsden 1980, Marty 1992. Evangelicals often differentiate themselves from fundamentalists (Tidball 1994: 17-18; Calver 1996a: 20; Stott 1999: 21-24), seeing fundamentalism as too theologically literalistic and socially separatist (Bebbington 1989: 275-6). However, this distinction may be overplayed. Hunter (1987: 4) views fundamentalism 'as a faction *within* Evangelicalism and not as a movement *distinct from* Evangelicalism'. Harriet Harris (1998: 313) distinguishes three understandings of fundamentalism: as a historical movement of the 1920s opposed to modernism; as 'an identity still assumed by old-style separatist fundamentalists, politicised neo-fundamentalists and occasionally also by evangelicals'; and as a 'mentality which has affected much of mainstream evangelicalism'. She argues that the professed divide between evangelicals and fundamentalists is less clear than evangelicals would like; evangelicals' 'high' view of the Bible often bears such resemblance to fundamentalist' that attempts to distinguish between the two do not withstand scrutiny.

speech believed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. Elim and the Assemblies of God are among the most significant British Pentecostal denominations (Bebbington 1989; Hilborn 1997; Tidball 1994). Since the 1960s Pentecostal influence spread to the mainline denominations through the Charismatic Renewal and House Church movements, to which this chapter will shortly turn.

Charismatic Renewal can be understood in the context of the 1960s counter-culture and the postmodern shift. Charismatic Renewal was a response and reaction to (mainly evangelical) Christian traditionalism, just as the secular counter-culture was to traditionalism within British society. Charismatic Renewal constituted a religious counter-culture or 'Expressive Revolution' (Martin 1981; Thurman 1979). It was a 1960s and 1970s phenomenon that reached its zenith in the mid 1970s, shortly after which its decline began (Walker 1985a: 263; Hocken 1986). In many senses a child of Pentecostalism, and thus justifiably termed 'neo-Pentecostalism' (Walker 1983), the Renewal movement prioritised experience, advocating something resembling the Pentecostalist 'baptism in the Spirit.' For Renewalists, however, experiences of the Holy Spirit were understood more as infusions than as a two-stage process. Being 'filled with the Spirit' was believed to produce *charismata*, spiritual 'gifts' including healing, prophecy, tongues and deliverance from demonic spirits. Charismatic Renewalists differed from classical Pentecostalists in being non-sectarian, insisting that God wanted to renew existing churches and denominations rather than create new ones (Walker 1985a: 263). Charismatic Renewal occurred mainly, certainly initially, in evangelical Anglican churches (Gunstone 1984). Like the counter-cultural activists, Renewalists were generally young and middle-class. Overall, Charismatic Renewal constituted a moderated Christian version of the secular counter-culture. A gulf remained between the two as regards lifestyle and sexual behaviour yet the two were closely related stylistically (Perman 1977: 61-63; Ward 1996: 80-104; Collins 2000: 228). The Renewal also helped keep young people in the churches by lessening the gulf between the church and secular youth culture (Bebbington 1989: 264; Ward 1996: 80-104; Collins 2000).[7]

Charismatic Renewal has also been linked to the transition to postindustrialism (Davies 1984) and late or postmodernity as regards its consumerist attitude to spirituality (Hunt et al. 1997: 10-13), its tendency toward 'pneumatological situationalism' in moral and

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[7] However, Kenneth Leech (1973: 168-169) argues that where Renewalists upheld conservative moral values, as those involved with the Festival of Light did (discussed later), they pushed some young people away.

theological questions and its emphasis on personal healing and empowerment (Percy 1997a: 215). However, most evidence of postmodern emphases in what is more commonly called the Charismatic Movement (used broadly for all occurrences of Charismatic phenomena since approximately 1960 and continuing into the third millennium) relates not to Charismatic Renewal but to the mid-1990s ecstatic phenomenon the 'Toronto Blessing'[8] (Hunt et al. 1997; Percy 1997a). Martyn Percy (1997a) argues that the Toronto Blessing was evidence of a middle-class loss of identity that arose from changes in professional status and work patterns. The ecstatic phenomena of the Renewal and Toronto Blessing can be identified as a postmodern divergence from rationalistic focus on the (in this case biblical) text to unstructured privileging of the symbolic; from a transcendent God encountered in an unchanging printed metanarrative to an immanent God experienced in unique unmediated fashion by each individual.

Bebbington[9] proposes that twentieth-century evangelicalism fused three cultural influences: modernity's Enlightenment project; the Romantic reaction against the Enlightenment; and the intellectual movement known as modernism which gave birth to postmodernity from the 1960s. The Charismatic Movement, which began to be so-called from the 1960s Renewal period, shows close continuities with postmodernity, while traditional conservative evangelicalism remains aligned with the Enlightenment project – these represent two poles or tensions within evangelicalism today.

The development of the House Church movement

While churches within the Charismatic Renewal remained within their denominations, a new, more sectarian movement was emerging during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Small groups of Christians began eschewing the established denominations and forming churches or 'fellowships'. Because some of their early activities took place in homes, these churches became known as 'House Churches,' and the developing movement

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[8] Originating at the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church in January 1994, the Toronto Blessing spread through Western evangelical (predominantly charismatic) churches. Participants experienced emotional and physical manifestations including falling over, uncontrollable laughter, weeping and, more unusually, groans and animal-like noises, in response to what they understood as the Holy Spirit (Chevreau 1994; Roberts 1994; Porter & Richter 1995; Percy 1996; Poloma 1996; Hilborn 2001). NFI endorsed and participated in the Toronto Blessing.

[9] In conversation at the conference 'On Revival', King's College London, 21st June 2002.

the 'House Church Movement.'[10] Bernice Martin (1981: 225-226) and Peter Hocken (1986) posit a close interrelationship between Charismatic Renewal and the House Churches that Andrew Walker refutes (1998: 59-60, 133-137, 269-272).[11] The House Churches had, in fact, been *in utero* during the 1950s and early 1960s, as men who later became key leaders met to discuss and pray over their growing vision of 'restoring' churches to what they saw as the New Testament pattern. Their theological roots stretch further back: to the nineteenth-century Brethren movement and the Catholic Apostolic Church, and twentieth-century Classical Pentecostalism in the form of the Apostolic Church and the Elim and Assemblies of God movements. House Churches share with earlier Pentecostalists the belief that being 'born again', or 'saved', is imperative for entrance to the Christian community and that believers should be baptised in water and 'of the Holy Spirit', this latter experience issuing in *charismata*. They also share an Adventist tendency and a view of scripture that would be considered fundamentalist.

Notwithstanding the distinctive features of the House Church movement that need delineation, the stylistic linkage between the House Churches and the Charismatic Renewal is significant. Both stressed personal experience of God through the Holy Spirit and enthusiastically practiced 'gifts of the Spirit'. The movements shared a worship style in which extempore songs, prayers and shouts were addressed to God amidst clapping, arm raising, dancing and a general atmosphere of freedom. Songs, audiotapes and music books reflecting the new worship ethos were swiftly produced and marketed and House Church and Renewal people sang each other's songs (Ward 1996: 107-142, 2003).

Andrew Walker (1998: 40-41) describes the House Church movement's focus:

> to return to the New Testament pattern (as they see it) of the Early Church…to restore a charismatically-ordained church, and one in which Christians are seen as living in a kingdom run according to God's order and rules…Restorationists believe that the Church should be run by divinely-appointed apostles, prophets and elders. Furthermore, they hold to a doctrine of 'discipleship' or 'shepherding', whereby church members submit themselves to those deemed to be their overseers and spiritual counsellors. Restorationists…see themselves as part of a potential worldwide

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[10] This term is somewhat of a misnomer, Walker (2002) points out. Walker 1985b (with revised editions in 1988, 1989 and 1998) is the established work on this movement and the source for this section. Other significant accounts include Thurman 1979 and 1982, Munden 1984 and Turner 1989.

[11] Hocken (1997: 207-211) has revised this thesis somewhat, arguing that Charismatic Renewal and Restoration were different strands of the Charismatic Movement.

> Church where brethren will meet to 'break bread' and to follow the apostles' teaching.

Three main distinctives set House Churches apart from their Pentecostal forerunners: an anti-denominational 'kingdom' theology; a distinctive ecclesiology; and their doctrine of 'discipleship' (see also Walker 1984, 1985a).[12] First, they believed that denominations are not in God's plan and must be replaced by the Church or the 'kingdom'. Denominational traditions were no longer necessary, and like John Nelson Darby (1800-82), leader of the Exclusive Brethren sect, they envisaged a worldwide church where Christians would meet together as brothers and sisters, free from ritualism, clericalism and structures. As Walker (1985a: 266-267) notes, this desire for universalism is paradoxically matched by a tendency towards exclusivism, and establishment of a 'true' church can resemble the creation of a new denomination. Within their theology, Jesus is the king who has appointed modern-day apostles to establish his kingdom on earth; when this is accomplished he will make a glorious return to earth.

Arising from this kingdom theology is the second distinctive feature, ecclesiology.[13] 'Restoring the church' (which became a key phrase) to what they perceived as the New Testament pattern for church life led House Church leaders to a leadership structure derived from Ephesians 4: 8-12.[14] Their emphasis on a 'restored' church led Walker, influenced by Bryan Wilson's (1970: 207) category 'restored churches', to label them 'Restorationists'. This was also a designation the House Churches used: their magazine which ran from 1975 to 1992 was called *Restoration*, Ron Trudinger's (1982) key early text *Built to Last* was subtitled *Biblical Principles for Church Restoration* and Terry Virgo, leader of NFI, published *Restoration in the Church* in 1985. From Ephesians 4 an ordered (many would say

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[12] It is difficult to decide whether to describe these distinctives in the past or present tense. While NFI have retained these Restorationist emphases, they are weaker and are sometimes articulated in different language than at Restorationism's inception, so I have chosen largely to use the past tense in these paragraphs.

[13] Davies (1986: 118) argues that this 'theocratic system of delegated government' is the major distinctive.

[14] These verses read: 'This is why it says: "When he [Christ] ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.' All Bible quotations in this thesis are taken from *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. This is the Bible version used by most members of New Frontiers International, and most commonly used within contemporary British evangelicalism. Its gender exclusiveness is problematic, as evidenced in this passage in which 'gave gifts to men' would be more accurately translated 'gave gifts to people.'

hierarchical) structure emerges, headed by several male apostles who are considered divinely appointed and are thus charismatic leaders in the Weberian sense. Apostles oversee local churches led by men known as 'elders.' This structure echoes that of the nineteenth-century Catholic Apostolic Church, who took many of their teachings from Edward Irving and moved away from the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers to a structured apostleship system.[15] From the late 1960s the men who were to become the key apostles and leaders assembled regularly to share and develop their vision.

The third distinctive, the doctrine of discipleship or 'shepherding', is allied to this structure (Aune, forthcoming). Discipleship occurred in the context of relationships in which some held authority over others to encourage their spiritual growth. House Church Christians were taught to submit to the advice of those placed in authority over them in potentially every area including marriage, finance, career and leisure. Children submitted to parents, wives to husbands and all to elders, who would submit to apostles, who, finally, submitted to each other. The discipleship doctrine originated in the teachings of Argentinian Juan Carlos Ortiz (1975), 'the father of discipling and shepherding doctrines in their modern Protestant form' (A. Walker 1998: 83), and was incorporated into Restorationism through the influence of Orvil Swindoll and a group of American men known as the 'Fort Lauderdale Five', independent Pentecostalists who worked closely with British House Church leaders in the early to mid 1970s. The five based their discipling teachings on those of Ortiz (A. Walker 1998: 83, 93). Chinese charismatic leader Watchman Nee's (1972) popular writings advocated a similar pattern of authority and submission. The shepherding doctrine is what earned Restorationists most criticism, from outsiders and ex-members who saw the system as unduly authoritarian and open to abuse (Tomlinson 1997). However, Restorationists stress that members submit voluntarily in the context of loving friendships with those 'over' them. Restorationism has thus generally been 'a movement of benign paternalism rather than rigid authoritarianism' (Walker 1985a: 268; see also Davies 1986: 49-62).

One notable occasion accelerated the House Churches' emergence. This was the London Festival of Light event, held in 1971 and 1972 and attracting an estimated 35,000 the first year and 20,000 the second (Cliff 1979: 128; Perman 1977; R. Wallis 1979). Attendees were predominantly young, middle-class and unmarried (Wallis & Bland 1979). Organised

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[15] But where the Catholic Apostolic Church limited apostleship to twelve men, Restorationists placed no upper limit on the number of apostles (A. Walker 1998: 239).

by Peter Hill, from a small House Church, and supported by non-House Church figures including Malcolm Muggeridge and Mary Whitehouse, the Festival of Light was a mass demonstration in Trafalgar Square against the 'permissive society', pornography in particular. But it was not just a protest: the Festival coincided with a visit by the prominent Arthur Blessitt and Larry Norman from the American Jesus Movement and Blessitt was invited to address the Trafalgar Square crowds. The Jesus Movement was a youth-oriented movement with much in common stylistically with the wider counter-culture (Ward 1996: 80-104). Attendees also viewed the Festival as an opportunity to witness publicly to their faith (Wallis & Bland 1979). The 1971 National Festival of Light's statement of intent gave as the reason for their protest: 'there is clear evidence that a determined assault is being made on family life, moral standards and decency in public entertainment and the mass media' (Cliff 1979: 132). The Festival of Light was closely linked to the 'New Right' and its backlash opposition to feminism (explored further in Chapters 3 and 4). It was the first event to assemble and make visible, to each other and outsiders, the substantial numbers of House Church members. Shortly after the Festival, and certainly by 1974, a self-styled 'Magnificent Seven' and then 'Fabulous Fourteen'[16] men had recognised each other as divinely appointed apostles; they began to lead the emerging Restoration movement (A. Walker 1998: 66-86).

I have so far argued that both Charismatic Renewal and the House Church movement were aligned with the counter-culture in prioritising experience over rationality. I also suggested that the Renewal could be interpreted as following the cultural shift to late or postmodernity of the second half of the twentieth century.[17] The House Church movement's alignment with this shift is more complex. For where the Renewal's prioritisation of experience has (arguably) reduced structure and Biblicism, Restorationists have juxtaposed their stylistically postmodern experientialism with an emphasis on church order and authority and a fundamentalist attitude to Scripture as true metanarrative which, James Beckford (1992: 20) argues, marks them out as a modern movement. William Davies (1986: 40, 58) hypothesises that Restorationism's constituency – middle-class married couples with young children – may have chosen the movement because it offers certainty in uncertain times. However, following Walker's (1985a) understanding of the House Church movement as a

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[16] These designations were intentionally humorous (A. Walker 1998: 76).

[17] For more on late and postmodernity, see Baudrillard 1983; Bauman 1992; Bell 1976; Brooker 1992; Connor 1996; Featherstone 1988; Giddens 1990, 1991, 1992, 1996; Harvey 1989; Jameson 1984; Lyotard 1984; Payne 1996; Ross 1989; Walker 1996: 161-187.

sectarian reaction to modernity, it would be possible to argue for its identification as one of the 'identity politics' special-interest movements, much like second-wave feminism or the gay rights movement, which are features of social fragmentation within late or postmodernity (Connor 1996: 430).

Fragmentation is a feature of contemporary evangelicalism,[18] notably of House Church groupings. Although the House Church's leaders initially worked together, differences were appearing from 1974. These differences centred on style and personality, with those Walker later called 'R2' viewing 'R1' leaders as too legalistic and controlled by those 'over' them in a way that tended towards authoritarianism. Joyce Thurman (1982: 98) names 'a personal difference' between two leaders as the first issue of tension; the second was masturbation. The debate about 'law' and 'grace' came to a head in disagreement over masturbation: 'R1' judged it unacceptable Christian behaviour, but 'R2' disagreed. In October 1976 Arthur Wallis, 'theological architect of the Restorationist movement in Britain' (Walker 2002: 60) and aligned with the 'R1' leaders, wrote to the 'R2' leaders disassociating himself from some of their attitudes and practices. Around that time, 'R1' and 'R2' ceased working together.

Andrew Walker (1985a, 1985b, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1998) created the established typology of Restorationism: R1 and R2. Based on Weber's concept of ideal types, R1 signifies those who most closely conformed to the characteristics above (anti-denominational kingdom theology, distinctive ecclesiology and the doctrine of discipleship). The main R1 groupings were the Coastlands (now New Frontiers International) churches led by Terry Virgo; the Harvestime (now split into at least four groups: Abundant Life Ministries, Covenant Ministries International, Lifelink International and Ministries Without Borders) churches led by Bryn Jones (who died in 2003); the churches belonging to Salt and Light Ministries led by Barney Coombs; and Tony Morton's Cornerstone Ministries (now c:net). R2 categorised churches which, while 'more Restorationist than not' (Walker 2002: 53), held to a more liberal version, notably Gerald Coates' Pioneer network, Dave Tomlinson's Team

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[18] Since the heydays of Charismatic Renewal and the House Churches, British evangelicalism has continued to fragment and readapt (Hilborn 1997: 72-3). Clive Calver et al. (1993) list twelve 'tribes' of contemporary British evangelicalism: Anglican evangelicals, Pentecostals, Ethnic churches, Renewal groupings, Separatists, Reformed evangelicals, Evangelical majorities, Evangelical minorities, Evangelical non-denominational groups, the New Churches, Independents and Evangelical denominations.

Work (closed around 1990)[19] and John Noble's Team Spirit (disbanded, partly into Pioneer, in the early 1990s) (Walker 2002: 62). Roger Forster's Ichthus Christian Fellowship churches in London are, in evangelical circles, often identified with R2 groupings, although they do not share a Restorationist ecclesiology (A. Walker 1998: 305, 385).

Fragmentation increased from the late 1980s (although these networks still occasionally collaborated) and the R1 and R2 rubric became less meaningful or accurate. R2 churches were becoming more ecumenical, less sectarian and less paternalistic. Their increasing openness was manifested in their attitudes to women, who began to be admitted as leaders in Pioneer and Ichthus. R2 was ceasing to be identifiable as Restorationist. In place of House Church or Restorationist terminology, R2 churches began to call themselves 'New Churches', a term Walker credits Gerald Coates with coining. A 1988 conference of R1, R2 and independent charismatic leaders 'was the crucible of the transformation of house churches into new churches' (Walker 2002: 60). From that point New Church was used as an umbrella term for networks and churches, generally of a charismatic evangelical persuasion, that emerged from the 1970s.[20] However, while R2 churches had metamorphosed into 'New Churches' and New Church[21] became an umbrella term for the whole movement, the R1 network continued largely to maintain their original Restorationist ideologies (Walker 2002).[22] Typologically, the New Churches were by then made up of Restorationists (New Frontiers International, Covenant Ministries International and c:net being the largest groupings) and various other 'New Churches'. Most recent figures put New Church attendance at 230,500 in 1998, of which a quarter were aged under 15 (Brierley 1999: 4.9). 1998 membership figures (which count only those aged 15 and above) are considerably smaller, at around 123,000 (Brierley 1999: 9.12). Estimates put New Church attendance in 2000 at 248,500 (Brierley 2001: 2.23) and 2000 membership at 140,000 (Brierley 2001: 2.22).[23]

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[19] After leaving Restorationism in the early 1990s, Tomlinson wrote *The Post-Evangelical* (1995). In 1998 he became an Anglican priest.

[20] Peter Brierley's (1997, 1999, 2001) *Religious Trends* volumes follow this practice. See also Brierley's (2000: 39-41) description of the New Church context.

[21] From now on I use New Church to signify Brierley's umbrella term and 'New Church' more narrowly to signify former R2 churches.

[22] Although some were drifting towards Walker's original meaning of R2 – their Restorationism had become a little softer.

[23] In my view Brierley over-estimates New Church commitment, perhaps by as much as 50-100%. Andrew Walker (1998: 390) and Robin Gill (1993: 218-220) echo this concern; Gill criticises Brierley's methodology for measuring New Church commitment. NFI, too, believe Brierley's figures are too high (emails received from

New Frontiers International

Before 1990 New Frontiers International were called 'Coastlands'. Towards the end of 2002, a year after I finished my fieldwork, NFI dropped 'International', becoming Newfrontiers.[24] Because the material to which I refer dates from before this change, and because 'NFI' has remained common parlance for the network, I do not reflect this name change in my thesis.[25]

Terry Virgo founded the group. Born in 1940 and converted at a Billy Graham crusade in the 1950s, Virgo experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the early 1960s, as Charismatic Renewal was beginning. From 1965-68 he studied at the evangelical London Bible College, where he met Wendy, whom he married in 1968. After graduation he moved to Seaford in Sussex to lead a small independent church. During the eleven years in Seaford he built links with others in the burgeoning House Church movement, and was invited to leaders' gatherings. Invitations to visit independent House Churches increased and he began to be asked to take on a long-term role overseeing their congregations. At the R1/R2 split of the mid 1970s he joined R1, with whom he had more in common. In 1979, by which time he had oversight of twenty to thirty churches (T. Virgo 2000: 7), he moved to Brighton to lead a newly-established congregation. That year, inspired by Bryn Jones' Yorkshire-based summer Dales Bible Week, he launched a southern equivalent, the Downs Bible Week, attracting almost 3,000. A Bible Week was somewhere between a conference and a festival. Visitors camped (often in church groups) onsite, attending daily teaching and worship meetings, seminars and leisure activities. Helped by the rapidly-growing Bible Weeks, which became 'a shopwindow for Restoration teaching and worship' (A. Walker 1998: 114), the 1980s saw remarkable growth in membership of churches Virgo oversaw. Walker estimates that by 1985 R1, of which Virgo's churches were a significant part, had 12,000-15,000 members and

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Steve Blaber, 27th October 2000 and 18th June 2004). For NFI attendance and membership, I rely on statistics provided by NFI's Steve Blaber and Justyn Pride.

[24] According to Steve Blaber (email received 18th June 2004), 'International' was dropped 'because that is what we are anyway and [we] did not feel the need to state it.' Additionally, 'the words New Frontiers in other languages have different meanings (e.g. in Russian it means New Barriers, as in border crossings) so we came up with this name as more of a brand than having a specific meaning although in the English language it would still be understood as a word indicating mission.'

[25] Unless otherwise indicated, the main source for this section is Terry Virgo's 2001 autobiography.

several thousand in other churches 'interested in Restoration principles' (A. Walker 1998: 117). Attendance at Downs Bible Week grew to 10,000 in 1987. Closed for 1989-90 and then reopened as Stoneleigh Bible Week (so called because it was held at the National Agricultural Centre at Stoneleigh, Warwickshire) and repeated a second week to cope with demand, turnout exceeded 20,000 each year from 1995 (T. Virgo 2000: 9), until Stoneleigh closed in 2001 in response to what they took as God's guidance (T. Virgo 2001: 337-346) with a reputed attendance of nearly 30,000.[26] Virgo also began gathering leaders of churches he oversaw for weekly prayer meetings. These multiplied, and as NFI's geographical influence extended, were eventually held at regional centres across Britain and beyond.

NFI now encompasses nearly 500 churches in over thirty countries.[27] In the last four years alone, NFI in Britain has grown from 25,000 members in 151 churches and 15 church plants (newly-created churches) in 2000[28] to 28,000 members in 184 churches and 62 church plants in 2004.[29] NFI is almost certainly the largest New Church network in Britain (Brierley 1999: 9.13, 2000: 41, 2001: 9.7).[30] As more churches sought his input over the years, Virgo delegated responsibility for overseeing local churches to other established NFI leaders. NFI's churches are now arranged in ten regional bases in Britain, led by all-male teams comprising apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.[31] Virgo leads the international team, as well as the India and UAE region. Other team bases are situated in Europe (led by David Holden), the USA (led by John Lanferman), and South Africa (led by Simon Pettit).[32] Eight men comprise this international team: Terry Virgo, Colin Baron, David Devenish, David Holden, John Lanferman, Simon Pettit, Nigel Ring and Steve Blaber.[33] Two-day prayer and fasting sessions for all NFI leaders have become established; these now attract several hundred, and in 2001 expanded to two locations in Britain.[34]

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[26] Figure announced by Terry Virgo, Stoneleigh Bible Week, August 2001.
[27] Email from Justyn Pride, 18th June 2004.
[28] Email from Steve Blaber, 27th October 2000.
[29] Email from Justyn Pride, 18th June 2004.
[30] Because of doubts about Brierley's figures, it is difficult to be certain.
[31] Email from Steve Blaber, 17th July 2001.
[32] Information from NFI's website www.n-f-i.org (accessed 29th August 2002).
[33] Information from NFI's website www.newfrontiers.xtn.org (accessed 11th June 2003). Rarely referred to as 'apostles', these men are more generally spoken of as having an 'apostolic role'. The roles of those on the international team are not fixed, as NFI believe in 'fluid teams' (email from Steve Blaber, 18th June 2004).
[34] A few women in full-time leadership positions (for example as youth workers or leaders of social action projects) attend these sessions. When I attended, about 5% of people were female.

NFI has been largely overlooked within academic literature on the House Church movement. Walker's first three editions of *Restoring the Kingdom* (1985, 1988, 1989) gave scant room to Virgo's movement, in comparison to their significant attention to the now less significant other networks. The fourth edition sought to remedy this, including ten pages of material on NFI (A. Walker 1998: 330-339). NFI are also missing from other key histories (Davies 1986; Thurman 1979, 1982; Munden 1984). With the exception of Charman's (1995) covert participation observation study of 'empowerment and enfeeblement' in three New Church congregations (one from NFI), James Steven's short (1989) work *Worship in the Restoration Movement* which foregrounds worship in NFI, David Smith's (2001) essay on the growth of NFI and Julian Millward's (2003) account of the impact of Restorationist ecclesiology on the Baptist Union (focussing on churches with a joint relationship with NFI and the Baptist Union), this may be the only academic analysis of the movement.

Although they prefer to identify themselves by their strapline 'Newfrontiers – A worldwide family of churches together on a mission'[35], NFI is largely a Restorationist network. In addition to the three Restorationist distinctives of ecclesiology, anti-denominational kingdom theology and discipleship and to the Pentecostalist emphasis on the charismata, other features identify NFI. NFI's mission is five-fold: 'Restore the Church; Make Disciples; Train Leaders; Plant Churches; Reach the Nations.'[36] A large church-planting program exists, with groups of NFI Christians moving, sometimes across the country, to begin new congregations. Church planting is responsible for just under half of NFI's continued growth, a rate of growth that sets it apart from other New Church networks.[37] 'House' or 'cell' groups of around a dozen people which meet weekly to pray, study the Bible, sing and develop close friendships have always been key within Virgo's churches in addition to Sunday services. But from the mid 1990s a new emphasis on increasing church membership through the 'cell church' system began sweeping across charismatic evangelical churches worldwide. Cell groups were to function as quasi-families, nuclei of spiritual nurture and the development of gifts and talents, as well as springboards for evangelism. NFI partially adopted this approach, which saw the midweek cell group as the primary weekly church event; NFI, however, consider Sunday services and house groups

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[35] Email from Steve Blaber, 18th June 2004.
[36] www.newfrontiers.xtn.org/our-mission/category_index.php?id=3 (accessed 9th March 2004).
[37] The rest (just over half) of NFI's churches are 'adopted' – that is, NFI take on oversight of already-existing congregations (Baron 2000: 22).

equally important.[38] William Beckham's (1995) 'four Ws' principle was adopted in some NFI churches, ensuring that cell group meetings encompassed time for welcome, worship, word (the Bible) and works (practical outworking of faith such as evangelism).[39]

In a chapter in his autobiography called 'Turning up the Contrast' Virgo details five areas where NFI differ from some evangelical churches. The first he lists – significant for this thesis – is NFI's belief that women should not hold 'governmental' leadership roles or engage in authoritative preaching to men. Virgo refers to the fact that observers in apparent jest refer to NFI as 'No Females Included,' a charge he rejects, detailing what he considers women's extensive involvement in NFI congregations. Second, Virgo rejects 'para-church organisations' such as mission agencies and university Christian Union groups. He rejects the third area, youth churches, for the same reason. Virgo believes that para-church organisations and youth churches take on the work which should be done by local churches and that by appealing to a specialist group they fail to reflect the diversity found in local churches in terms of age, gender and socio-economic status. Fourth, NFI do not hold to dispensationalism – the belief that the Jews remain God's chosen people. For NFI, God's chosen people are the whole church. Fifth, NFI rejects particular techniques of the 'spiritual warfare' movement, who believe that demons afflict particular geographical locations and require specific exorcism methodologies (Virgo 2001: 301-313).

NFI are distinctive particularly for their fusion of Calvinism and experientialism. NFI refer to this as a dual emphasis on 'word' and 'Spirit'. On the one side, theirs is a Reformed theology that emphasises the Bible as the Word of God and final authority, and the sovereign omnipotence of God (Wilshire 2001). This Calvinism derives from Virgo's early respect for Westminster Chapel (London) minister Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Baptist leader C. H. Spurgeon (A. Walker 1998: 332). On the other, they advocate openness to the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit and prioritise non-rational religious experiences. Their spiritual openness comes from their shared ground with the Charismatic Renewal movement and earlier Pentecostalism. It derives also from Virgo's friendship in the 1990s with John Wimber, the American founder of the Vineyard movement of churches. Vineyard is distinctive in its ecumenism and gentle use of the charismata (A. Walker 1998: 333-334; Millward 2003). NFI's openness to what they understand as the movement of the Holy Spirit

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[38] Email from Steve Blaber, 18th June 2004.
[39] Popular evangelical books on the cell church concept include Cho 1987, Khong 2000 and Neighbour 2000.

was evident in the Toronto Blessing period of the mid 1990s, to which NFI churches responded enthusiastically. NFI is therefore a movement of tension and contradiction. It is also (because it is a radical, wholehearted movement energised by stressing both 'word' and 'spirit') a movement of considerable strength. It is important and interesting in its own right, but also because, as I touched on in describing contemporary evangelicalism as a movement combining an older Enlightenment rationalism with newer, more fluid and late-/postmodern experientialism, it shows up microcosmically the tensions, contradictions and strengths of contemporary evangelicalism more broadly. Studying NFI, and a local church as a case study example, may reveal the dilemmas of British evangelicalism as a whole – in this case regarding gender issues.

I began my research in the knowledge that NFI forbade women from taking 'governmental' eldership roles, that its discipleship doctrines required married women's submission to their husbands, and that it encouraged the development of leadership qualities in men. While nothing I found contradicted these initial assumptions, fieldwork demonstrated a far more complex interaction between faith and culture, a far more intimate appropriation and rejection of British notions and practices of gender than I was prepared for. Chapter 4 turns to these discoveries, but it is first necessary to explain how, why and from what epistemological, political and ethical positions this research was conducted.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Introduction

'Good research', writes Liz Stanley (1990: 13), 'should account for the conditions of its own production'. It should be 'unalienated knowledge'. It should not pretend to be 'innocent knowledge' (Flax 1993b) – one-dimensional, unproblematically forged or unchallengeable. Feminists and postmodernists have thoroughly questioned the modernist conception that knowledge=truth=freedom (Flax 1993b). Although the value of these epistemological challenges is not obvious to all, they have transformed the theory and practice of social research. Focusing particularly on feminist contributions to social research, this chapter attends to my epistemology (theory of knowledge), methodology (theory or rules about how research should proceed) and methods (procedures for gathering data).[40] Finally, it considers research ethics and the extent to which I call my research feminist.

Epistemology

Modernist epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning social science research have been interrogated by feminism and postmodernism. Critical theorising has radically undone conceptions of researchers as 'objective' knowing selves who discover the true nature of the social world through rationality (humanism) or sense experience (empiricism).[41] Under feminist scrutiny 'objectivity' is revealed as middle-class, white (etc.) men's bias (MacKinnon 1982: 23) and the subjectivity of socially located researchers is favoured. Moreover, 'subjectivity' is disclosed as constructed, not innate, raising the

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[40] Early feminist methodology did not always distinguish between epistemology, methodology and method (Harding 1987a; Ramazanoğlu & Holland 2002: 10-11).
[41] See Flax's 1993a account of subjectivity in Western philosophy.

questions: if there is no self other than the self constructed in discourse, can a 'self' make claims to knowledge, and can knowledge claims be considered 'true'?

There are three broad feminist epistemological positions that go beyond the 'add women and stir' approach of early feminist social science (Oakley 1974; Smith 1979: 147). These are feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint and feminist postmodernism. Feminist empiricism is the least relativist, feminist postmodernism the most, with feminist standpoint occupying a middle ground (Stanley & Wise 1990). I will not discuss feminist empiricism,[42] but will introduce feminist standpoint and feminist postmodernism. I will then identify an epistemological position I take between these two that I call a single Christian feminist standpoint.

Feminist standpoint

Marxism underpins the feminist standpoint approach. Dorothy Smith's (1974, 1979, 1988a) concern with *women's* experiences, the 'standpoint of women,' is foundational. Smith argues that sociology is part of the way in which men (especially ruling-class men) govern women. She advises sociologists to take as their subject the experiences of women, who are subjugated. Here standpoint theory resembles feminist empiricism. But Smith goes further in seeing researchers as situated in the research process and subject to interrogation. Researchers should strive to produce fuller knowledge by revealing the social relations between men and women (including those researchers experience) that constitute women's oppression (Stanley & Wise 1990: 27).

Similarly adopting the 'proletarian standpoint' to conceptualise women as subordinated by men, who assign to them forms of subjugated labour (domestic, reproductive, etc.), Nancy Hartsock (1983, 1998) advocates a *feminist* rather than *women's* standpoint. She regards women's understanding of the world as an 'inversion' of men's. Hilary Rose (1983: 90) believes women's 'caring labour and the knowledge that stems from participation in it' should constitute a basis for knowledge. For Alison Jaggar (1983), those oppressed because of their gender possess epistemological advantage. These Marxist and materialist arguments claim a relationship between human understanding and embodied

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[42] For more on feminist empiricism see Millman & Kanter 1975, Keller 1982, Graham 1983, Harding 1986a, 1986b, 1987a, 1987b, 1993 and Hawkesworth 1989.

experiences in which 'human activity, or "material life," not only structures but also sets limits on human understanding: what we do shapes and constrains what we can know' (Harding 1987b: 185).

Despite substantial challenges (see below), Hartsock retains her central argument, modified by counterarguments addressing the difficulty of positing a singular feminist standpoint. Against postmodernist epistemologies she argues that oppressed people, who possess fuller knowledge because of their subjugation, must engage in the 'process of constituting ourselves as subjects as well as objects of history' (1998: 240). Not only is knowledge of the power relations by which they are constrained possible; the oppressed must resist subjection and promote a fairer social reality. Hartsock recommends avoiding generalisations that erase differences between women, suggesting 'feminist standpoints' as a more useful formulation. Similarly, many standpoint theorists point out that standpoint theory is not (or not simply) concerned with knowledge from women's perspective; rather, the knowledge needed is from a feminist perspective – from the perspective of those struggling for women's emancipation.

Whether ontology and epistemology conjoin, and the role female embodiment plays in the creation of a feminist standpoint epistemology, are disputed. Harding (1987a: 11) believes that a social structuring as 'woman' is not necessary (one need not 'be' a woman to take a feminist standpoint).[43] Alison Assiter (1996: 90-91) points out that this works against the Marxist claim that oppression generates for the oppressed a distinctively valuable knowledge of the world. Although she offers this criticism, Assiter (1996: 91) opts, like Harding, for 'the standpoint of communities of individuals which are more committed to emancipatory values'. Against a differentiation of epistemology from ontology Stanley (1990: 14-15) argues that a feminist standpoint should be linked to ontology, though not necessarily with ontology as prior. As a woman (based on her current cultural and material construction rather than an essentialist 'biological' femaleness) discovers, then challenges, her oppression she develops a feminist ontology and epistemology.

Feminist postmodernism

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[43] See also Connolly 1996 and Liddle 1996.

Feminist postmodernist and poststructuralist epistemologies (Spelman 1988; Hekman 1990) pose two primary challenges to feminist empiricist and standpoint epistemologies.[44] First, they highlight differences between women. They question the claim that 'women' or 'feminists' can produce knowledge for 'women' without oppressing and marginalising less privileged groups of women, who become subsumed under unmarked categories like 'women'. Women are diversified by features including class, 'race'/ethnicity, sexuality, age, ability/disability, nationality and religion (even if religion is rarely included in lists of aspects of difference), which feminists should incorporate into their epistemologies.[45] The female subject, Teresa de Lauretis (1988: 14) argues, is a 'site of differences'; differences are 'within', not just 'among' women. Women possess or exhibit 'fractured identities' (Harding 1986c) which postmodernists charge feminist standpoint theory with ignoring (see debates in Harding 2004).

Second, postmodernist and poststructuralist epistemologies reveal 'women' and 'woman' as discursive constructs possessing no subjectivity other than that constituted through discourses (see Chapter 3). They are suspicious of 'universalising' claims including those of feminism, understanding them as a way power masquerades as knowledge; only certain knowledge-producers may define and create (likely oppressively) others' subjectivities. If subjectivity is fragmented and discursively produced, if 'woman,' 'women' and 'feminism' are constructs, how can 'woman', 'women' or 'feminists' have a standpoint? Jane Flax (1990: 27) opposes the idea that a feminist or women's standpoint can be advanced as more true than 'male' standpoints, since 'none of us can speak for "woman" because no such person exists except within a specific set of already gendered relations'. While 'true' knowledge is impossible, Flax maintains that creation of subjectivity/ies usefully enables women to exercise agency, resist domination and work for justice.

These challenges do not necessarily discount the possibility of feminist standpoint positions. Black feminist thinker Patricia Hill Collins (1997: 375) believes standpoint theory is necessary for 'explicating how knowledge remains central to maintaining and changing

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[44] Hekman (1997) and Harding (1997) note a third challenge: the postmodernist re-evaluation of the Marxist project on which standpoint theory was based.

[45] For black women's critique of unmarked feminism, see hooks 1984, Dill 1987, Ladner 1987, Collins 1990, Marshall 1994. For working-class critiques see Glucksman 1994, Skeggs 1997. Frye 1983, Hoagland 1988a, 1988b and Wittig 1992 give lesbian critiques. These differences combine to produce positions (standpoints?) such as 'black British feminist' (Mirza 1997) that may be seen as 'fractured', 'flexible' or 'hybrid' (Rassool 1997) and further fragment 'women' and 'feminism'.

unjust systems of power' that oppress particular groups. As Stanley and Wise (1990: 28) point out, following Harding (1986b), the attention to difference that has been associated with postmodernist critiques arises from standpoint itself:

> We are driven to recognise the existence of not only 'a' feminist standpoint but also those of black women, working-class women, lesbian women, and other 'minority' women, and also those women who combine these oppressions. Once we admit the existence of feminist stand*points* there can be no a priori reason for placing these in any kind of a hierarchy; each has *epistemological* validity because each has *ontological* validity.

Susan Hekman considers standpoint theory's assumption that knowledge is always situated a postmodernist approach. Despite the fact that 'women speak from multiple standpoints, producing multiple knowledges', standpoint as a site of feminist collective knowledge can be used to advance political goals (Hekman 1997: 363).

The epistemological location of my research: a single Christian feminist standpoint

My epistemology lies between feminist standpoint and feminist postmodernism. Researchers have so far approached NFI from the 'partial and perverse perspective' (Harding 1987b: 185) they possess as male sociologists and of NFI's male leaders. They fail to locate themselves on the 'same critical plane' (Harding 1987a: 8) as those they are researching. Gender remains tangential to their research. My thesis produces a new kind of knowledge derived through commitment to understanding and challenging oppression. Influenced by postmodernists' fear of totalising analyses, I do not claim to reveal 'the truth' about NFI, but, with standpoint theorists, to have constructed a fuller, more 'radical' portrayal (Assiter 1996: 92) than NFI has hitherto received.

In addressing the extent to which researchers or participants are coherent, or just discursively constructed, selves, I endorse Hekman's (2000: 298) contention that a middle ground between the 'modernist essentialist subject' and the 'fictional subject' is possible. I believe identity can be an 'ungrounded ground' (Hekman 2000), the self can be 'relational' (Layton 1998) rather than only core or fictional. I am influenced by Donna Haraway (1991),

who opts to retain both, or stand between (Lykke et al. 2004: 336-337), feminist standpoint and postmodern feminist epistemologies, even if this appears contradictory. Haraway proposes 'a doctrine of embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects' (1991: 188), calling this 'situated knowledges'. She argues that 'only partial perspective promises objective vision...Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object' (1991: 190). Critical of the essentialism likely in epistemologies premised on identity politics, she advocates 'mobile positioning' (1991: 192-193) that promotes the interests of the materially and socially subjugated. Knowing is partial and incomplete but possible, she contends.

Against some postmodernist perspectives, I want to keep in view materiality: social life involves bodies, not just discourses. NFI exclude 'women' from becoming church elders on the basis of the sexual categorisation they were assigned at birth and their subsequent development into 'women'. These women's bodies are important as the basis for their marginalisation. I am interested in the knowledge women construct as embodied female subjects of NFI's dominant discourses. To ignore NFI women's subjectivity would be to deny them, as the church often does, epistemic rights. Considering only discourses would be to examine almost exclusively the words of men, for it is men in NFI who write most books and preach most sermons. As many feminist theorists remark (Hartsock 1987; Mascia-Lees et al. 1989: 14-15; Flax 1990: 220), since women won at some cost the ability to speak as subjects, I am wary that asserting the death of the subject denies them speech and agency.

I take de Lauretis' point that arguing from women's standpoint is problematic. Since 'reality' is 'concealed by layers of ideology' (Hartsock 1998: 232), women do not necessarily recognise their oppression; oppression is also constructed ideologically. My responsibility as a feminist researcher is to do more than present NFI women's perspectives.[46] Although some NFI women demonstrate feminist consciousness, recognising that women (some especially) are marginalised in NFI compared with most men, others seem unconscious of oppression. While I take Harding's point that men may take a feminist standpoint, evidence from NFI did not confirm this – though men occasionally appeared uncomfortable that NFI denied women eldership roles, the ease they demonstrated in reconciling this belief militated against the development of a feminist consciousness.

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[46] For one thing, this Ph.D. is about *men's and* women's gendered lives.

My standpoint is not so much 'women's' but 'feminist'; it is formed through struggle to improve women's lives. A 'multiple standpoint methodology' recognising women's multiple social locations (Naples 2003: 67-85) is needed. I foreground gender and marital status, but my standpoint is informed by other forms of oppression – of the middle-aged, non-white, non-heterosexual and non-middle-class.

I work particularly from a single feminist standpoint. NFI support only two marital/relational options: celibate singleness or heterosexual marriage, the latter being more enthusiastically upheld (see Chapters 6 and 8). If NFI members do not fit these categories – and they generally strive to – their relational states are rarely legitimised and may be even be proscribed. My single standpoint is a response to this. By 'single' I mean not simply unmarried but rather a configuration of diverse non-partnered positions that locate women outside intimate couple relationships, marriage and 'the' family. A single standpoint has not been specifically theorised, but it works on the same principle as black or lesbian standpoints. Harding's (1991) essay on lesbian standpoint provides a starting point. Taking a single feminist standpoint involves, I propose, challenging single women's relegation to the margins of nuclear family-centred societies and reclaiming singleness as potentially liberating, despite structural constraints (see Chapter 8). Single feminist standpoint theorists do what Tuula Gordon (1994: 192) calls 'making their margins their centres' and use that emancipatory struggle as a basis for knowledge.

I endorse postmodern feminist epistemologists' scepticism of claims to represent 'women' or particular groups of women (like 'single women'). If I designate a group 'single women', what of variations within it? How do divorce, widowhood, age, class, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality or parenthood/childlessness diversify and fragment the group I call 'single women'? If I claim to produce knowledge for them or from their perspective, how valid is this since they and I differ so significantly? Although single women seem closest to a shared feminist position (see Chapter 8), it is important to interrogate their different social locations and oppressions. It is also important to consider the status of married women who, though they have access to greater religious authority, possess less capacity for autonomy than single women (Aune 1998: 57-58). But while I consider it possible to produce emancipatory knowledge about people without sharing their ontological 'identity' characteristics, I believe that achieving a feminist standpoint on behalf of those whose oppressions the researcher has not struggled against (for herself or others), is difficult.

My 'intellectual autobiography' (Stanley & Wise 1990: 23) feeds into my single feminist standpoint. When I wrote my MA dissertation on single women's marginalisation within my own congregation (Aune 1998) the opposition I faced from the church and its leaders was instrumental in developing my realisation that as a feminist I was constructed as an unacceptable 'other'. While this led to my estrangement from that congregation, I gained a 'way of seeing' (Haraway 1991); from that ontological position I forged an epistemology (Stanley 1990: 14-15) that inspired this research. I wanted to see more fully, so that I could challenge more wisely where necessary, the ways in which men and women were constructed in evangelicalism.

I did not vocally challenge gender inequalities at NFI or Westside whilst I was there – this thesis may do that job – but I spent the duration of my fieldwork involved in feminist work within evangelicalism. I wrote about women's issues in evangelical publications. I tried to subvert attitudes to women in my own Anglican church. I taught evening courses on gender at an evangelical educational institution. In addition to my Ph.D. research I was finishing work on an expanded, book-length version of my MA study. This book (Aune 2002) was published by an evangelical publisher and written to appeal to a Christian as well as an academic audience; I hoped it would encourage improvements in evangelical churches' treatment of single women. These experiences sharpened my single Christian feminist standpoint at Westside and helped me identify with women there who were marginalised.

Christianity is integral to the epistemological location of this thesis. While I reveal NFI's gender practices and ideals as socially constructed, I do not question the 'reality' of their Christian beliefs. So when reporting how NFI refer to divinity I write God rather than 'God'. As a Christian I respect NFI's theology, though my own perspective is less conservative. The debate over whether shared religiosity between researcher and researched is positive or negative is complex (MacIntyre 1964; Wiebe 1985; Jaffee 1997; Brown 1999; McCutcheon 1999; Arweck & Stringer 2002) and I recognise the validity of differing positions. Sharing a Christian epistemological commitment with NFI has influenced my research and how NFI perceived me (see later discussion). Yet because I use a framework from feminist sociology of gender rather than religious studies or the sociology of religion, I

bypass questions about the origin and operation of religious belief; this makes a decisive position less urgent.[47]

Pertinent to my epistemology are Harding's point that feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint are 'transitional epistemologies' and Hartsock's (1998: 235) reminder that feminist standpoint theory was not intended as site of vision advocated for all knowledge of social relations everywhere but for western capitalist societies. Likewise, my epistemological positioning, constructed and situated at a particular point in culture and history, is limited and subject to change. My single Christian feminism is not a stable standpoint. While earlier in my research I identified myself as an evangelical, and therefore reformist, feminist, I have since moved towards a more revisionist stance.[48] The knowledge I am producing is contextually and temporally contingent even as it attempts to be faithful to the social circumstances I observed and interacted in.

Methodology

Grounded theory

The methodology I chose was grounded theory; in this section I explore its theoretical and practical dimensions, linking my application of it to my feminist research commitments. Grounded theory, 'the discovery of theory from data – systematically obtained and analysed in social research' (Glaser & Strauss 1967: 1), was developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss[49] and further theorised by others, notably Juliet Corbin (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Glaser 1992, 1994a, 1995a, 1995b, 2001; Strauss 1987; Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1997, 1998). It has been widely adopted within sociology. Fiene (1993: 32) explains:

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[47] St. Paul's words, 'Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known' (1 Cor. 13: 12) point towards a useful Christian epistemology, holding in tension modernist/realist and postmodernist/relativist notions of knowledge. Like feminist standpoints, Christian standpoints are multiple and intersect with other social locations.

[48] In particular, I admire the work of Sarah Coakley, Sally McFague, Virginia Mollenkott, Letty Russell and Janet Martin Soskice.

[49] Glaser and Strauss later disagreed. Glaser 1992 critiques Strauss and Corbin 1990. See Babchuk's 1996 summary of their debates.

Grounded theory refers to a research process based on the use of inductive reasoning. Empirical data, consisting of the researcher's observations and the participants' statements, are used to generate conceptual categories and define their properties. The data are then analyzed for patterns of relationships occurring between categories as a means of elucidating the concepts and developing an explanatory theory that fits the data.

Grounded theory employs techniques including: coding; memo writing; constant comparison between data; 'theoretical sampling' (sampling oriented towards formulating the emerging theory) (Charmaz 1994; Stern 1994; Glaser 1994b); and collecting data until achieving 'theoretical saturation' (when apart from minor variations, no new data are being uncovered) (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 292).

Grounded theory is inspired by the symbolic interactionist approach to studying social life[50] and part of the interpretivist strand of sociology.[51] As in Herbert Blumer's two-fold 'exploration' and 'inspection' method of theory generation, grounded theorists aim at a more 'naturalistic' (Blumer 1969: 46) uncovering of social life than positivists. Rather than testing a pre-selected hypothesis empirically, grounded theory enables theory to be generated as a result of, and during, empirical research. Blumer's contention that a symbolic interactionist perspective increases researchers' flexibility and brings them closer to those they study – an assumption common to grounded theorists – is important. As Blumer writes, 'if the scholar wishes to understand the action of people it is necessary for him [sic] to see their objects as they see them.' Glaser and Strauss (1967: 226-227) imply that grounded theorists' 'informed detachment' satisfactorily amalgamates insider and detached observer perspectives.

Some feminists propose grounded theory that accounts explicitly for the situatedness of researcher and researched. Although she does not name grounded theory as her methodology, Dorothy Smith (1988b) proposes something like a feminist standpoint grounded theory, suggesting feminist ethnographers should approach settings without prior

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[50] Symbolic interactionism contributes the basic insight that the self is formed through social interaction (Blumer 1969; for overviews see Plummer 1991, Charon 2001, Atkinson & Housley 2003).

[51] This approach has challenged the positivist strand of sociology, which held that society could be studied 'scientifically' (therefore only evaluating those propositions that are directly testable), preferred quantitative methods and larger social structural understandings of social life (Abercrombie et al. 1994: 322-323). Conversely, interpretivists concentrated on individuals' social actions. Weber critiqued positivist approaches in favour of *Verstehen*, an emphasis on meaningful social action which, rather than concentrating on outside explanations for social phenomena considers the meanings people give to their actions (Weber 1964; Outhwaite 1986).

hypotheses and objectives. Judith Wuest (1995) argues more thoroughly that feminist and grounded theory methodologies are compatible.[52] She lists as epistemological features common to both: acceptance of plural interpretations of social reality; 'theory as process' (Glaser & Strauss 1967: 32); using (women's) experiences as a basis for knowledge; knowledge as contextual; awareness of researcher bias. Shared methodological features (listed separately) include: awareness of bias in the research question; non-hierarchical relationships between researcher and participants; acceptance of participants' diverse beliefs and experiences; using participants statements verbatim as a source of knowledge; commitment to using theory as a vehicle for social change.[53] Wuest points to two areas of tension between grounded theory and feminism: 'the potential imposition of feminist ideology on the analysis' and 'the collaborative analysis of data'[54] (1995: 135). Her conclusion is helpful. Using feminist theory to aid grounded theory generation can eliminate patriarchal bias, she says, but as grounded theorists argue, theory should be 'driven by' the data (1995: 133).

Although I favoured an inductivist rather than deductivist methodology,[55] generating my theory largely through research, my feminist epistemology led me to rule out an 'empty-headed' approach. I approached NFI as Kristin Aune, an embodied person formed through my own culture's discourses and my prior experiences and understandings of the world. My process of theory generation occurred as follows:

From the outset I discerned a tension in NFI. I observed an insistence on order, structure, authority, hierarchical church leadership, rationality, moral codes and a biblicist, even fundamentalist, view of the Bible which necessitated gender-differentiated functions (men as leaders in the home and church, women as supportive and submissive). This was coupled with a flexible disdain for tradition and a reliance on the mysterious movement of God (especially in the form of the Holy Spirit) who as giver of 'spiritual gifts' and promoter of equality between Christians could override and undercut gendered roles, rendering women

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[52] See also Keddy et al. 1996 on this.

[53] However, Wuest is insufficiently aware of the complexity and diversity of feminist methodology. She fails to acknowledge different feminist epistemologies. Her separation of methodology and epistemology is problematic: she includes epistemological issues within her methodology section and awkwardly elides method and methodology. Moreover, although Wuest claims to propose a 'feminist grounded theory', she is mostly making the case that grounded theory is feminist.

[54] Who she means collaborates is unclear.

[55] Stanley and Wise (1990: 22-23) caution against a dichotomisation between deductivism and inductivism.

and men equal channels of his[56] love, message and authority. At first I called this a tension between 'order and intimacy,' later 'order and openness', then 'closedness and openness'. In common with most studying evangelicalism and gender I noticed that NFI manifested hierarchical *and* egalitarian patterns, sometimes apparently simultaneously. While NFI generally seemed to favour the ordered side of the tension, the situation in Westside was more divided, sometimes spectral. Order/closedness and intimacy/openness were key, I believed, to understanding NFI's structure, theology and gender practices.

Later it seemed problematic not to locate this tension in its social context or with reference to gender theory. Using copious diagrams and memos (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 217-241) to explore the tension with reference to the social context of contemporary Britain, I attempted mapping diagrammatically the relationship between modernity and late or postmodernity, positing that what is 'closed' or 'ordered' in NFI corresponded to what evangelicalism had inherited from modernity, and what is 'open' to late- or postmodern fluidity (Bauman 2000). But accurately locating contemporary Britain – let alone the church as it interacts with it – in relation to modernity and late/postmodernity is complicated. Also, a modernity/postmodernity framework can obscure the central focus of gender; even if it does not, debates about what constitute modern or late/postmodern manifestations of gender[57] are not sufficiently resolved for me to use this as my central theoretical framework.

My developing single Christian feminist standpoint epistemology influenced the emergence of the theoretical framework I call 'postfeminism', which I delineate in the next chapter. I realised that sociologists, particularly feminist sociologists, often describe gendered social life as amalgamating, or holding in tension, Victorian or 1950s conservative notions of gender and new formulations created by feminist movements, changes in working patterns and the two world wars. I began to encounter descriptions of this blend as 'postfeminist.' Setting out to theorise postfeminism, I became convinced that the contradiction and combination of conservative and feminist notions and practices of gender that exists in contemporary Britain was what I was witnessing at NFI. I began to understand

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[56] God was, though, always spoken of with male pronouns.

[57] Lutz (1995: 256-257) tabulates differences between gender ideologies of modernity and postmodernity, equating modernity with the notion of man as producer and postmodernity of woman as consumer and seeing postmodernity as a period that shifts focus from masculinity (which is considered paradigmatic of modernity) to femininity. I dispute such a clear differentiation: modernity bred gendered separate spheres *and* first-wave feminism; postindustrial capitalism encourages women's employment in the public sphere *and* subordinates them into lower-paid jobs that trade on older 'feminine' characteristics.

NFI as caught between different cultural patterns of gender (namely separate spheres, feminism, an anti-feminist backlash) amalgamated in a late-modern context to produce a melange I call postfeminism. Grounded theory aided the generation of this theoretical framework or 'central category' (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 147); I was reassured of its suitability since it conformed to Strauss and Corbin's criteria for choosing a central category. Postfeminism is, as Strauss and Corbin require, broad enough to encompass key themes, use as an overarching concept and apply to other areas of research. It is accessible to academics, especially those who locate themselves within feminist epistemological frameworks, and may therefore be developed for broader use.

Grounded theory helped generate my chapter content. Drawing on Strauss and Corbin's (1998: 57-241) open, axial and selective coding techniques, I coded my fieldnotes and interview transcripts thematically. Taking small sections from my fieldnotes (for example a comment made by a Westside member or an incident relating to gender) and interview transcripts, I cut and pasted these using Microsoft Word into tables listing subthemes. I assembled these subthemes to form the main chapter themes: the gendering of church roles, marriage, masculinity and women's singleness. So when Westside's leader Chris (pseudonym) told the group that he made sure he left work at 5.30pm so that he could spend the evenings with his family, I coded this as 'fatherhood,' 'work' and 'family'. When the subtheme coding was complete, I gathered the main subthemes (those with at least half a dozen references) under chapter themes generated on the basis of these subthemes, some initially duplicated as Strauss and Corbin (1998: 104) say is usual (Chris' comment was placed in the masculinity and marriage chapters to await further placement). Tackling areas of duplication first, I decided which chapter I would tackle each subtheme within. I then selected the most prominent subthemes and discarded the rest. For example, my masculinity chapter contained the subthemes 'fatherhood', 'work', 'male sexuality', 'real masculinity' and 'sport'; counting the frequency with which these subthemes appeared in the data, I chose the two most prominent, 'fatherhood' and 'male sexuality'. I was able to add elements of the discarded themes into the discussion where they appeared in conjunction with the two main subthemes, but material relating to some of these (for example, 'sport') had to be discarded for reasons of space.

I selected as chapter themes the topics that seemed most prominent, guided by other work in this area. Since most scholars of evangelical gender practices give prime place to

marriage, I felt it advisable to include a chapter on marriage. This, and the perception that marriage was more central to NFI than singleness, influenced my chapter ordering. The marriage and masculinity chapters appear before the singleness chapter, and there is no femininity chapter to correspond to the masculinity chapter; thus my thesis does not escape 'patriarchal' ordering. Yet I am content that this structure is faithful to the data and my epistemological commitments. I initially wrote a chapter about femininity, focusing on motherhood and physical appearance. However, when space constraints necessitated removing one chapter, I selected this one because it emerged least easily from the data. This is because NFI do not emphasise femininity as they do masculinity. As R. W. Connell (1987: 183) argues with reference to contemporary western 'hegemonic masculinity' (see Chapter 7), 'There is no femininity that is hegemonic in the sense that the dominant form of masculinity is hegemonic among men'. Women are not persuaded to (re)construct themselves according to an ideal as men are. While NFI encourage 'real' manhood, they lack a concept of 'real' womanhood. Forms of femininity (such as physical attractiveness and motherhood) are privileged, but are not promoted with the effort expended on forming men into 'real men.' There is no hegemonic femininity, Connell argues, because hegemony is something women, in a patriarchal society, have limited possession of. Furthermore, unlike masculinity, femininity is not associated with struggle for dominance. Concerned as this thesis is with postfeminist gender discourses, NFI's lack of discourse concerning femininity needs acknowledging, as the lack of a femininity chapter symbolically does. From a single feminist standpoint, the chapter order and thematisation mirrors single women's discursive and material subordination in NFI. The chapter on singleness, placed last in recognition of single women's marginal position, shows also how they (physically and discursively) 'answer back' in resistance.

My grounded theory methodology did not generate the definitive theory of NFI's gender practices. The results of my grounded theorising fit the data and coalesced with my epistemological position. As Wuest (1995) advocates, I employed feminist theorising about changing gender relations and postfeminism to hone the theory that was emerging – or I was constructing – from my data.

Methods

My principal method was ethnographic observation, primarily at a local congregation. Wanting triangulation, I aimed for something like Eileen Barker's (1984) tripartite methods (in-depth interviews, participant observation and questionnaires).[58] Besides fifteen months at one congregation, I attended approximately thirty Sunday services at around ten other NFI congregations; two two-day 'Prayer and Fasting' gatherings for NFI leaders and full-time workers; NFI's summer festival 'Stoneleigh Bible Week' for one day in 2000 and a week in 2001; and one evening gathering for NFI churches in Westside's local region. I analysed NFI's published literature and audiotaped sermons. I conducted structured interviews with twenty members of Westside and about that many NFI leaders. I carried out informal, unstructured interviews with half a dozen marginal or ex-members[59] and engaged in some quantitative work, counting, for example, church attendance.

I did not interview Terry Virgo, NFI's main leader, and include almost no material from the interviews with about fifteen leaders I conducted at the leaders' Prayer and Fasting gatherings. This was partly because published literature answering the sorts of questions I would ask leaders is available. I also excluded interviews with leaders because I was particularly interested in the views of 'ordinary' members. Furthermore, concentrating on leaders would have meant concentrating on men, since only men were church 'elders', and women in leadership roles were very few. Engaging with NFI men was vital to my research, but I did not want them to take centre-stage. Feminist research may legitimately consider men, for men and women's lives are often so interwoven that to focus on one to the exclusion of the other would be nonsensical (Kelly et al. 1994; Glucksmann 1994: 157-158). Conscious that men heavily dominated public NFI discourse, leaving little opportunity (especially in NFI's large-scale public settings) for women's experiences and analyses to be heard, I was interested in shifting the focus towards women. I include detailed information about NFI's public discourse and quote many publications and sermons authored by men. But I also

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[58] Although advocated especially by realist methodologists (Denzin 1970; Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 198-200; Fetterman 1989: 89; Silverman 1993: 156-158), testing for consistency of findings using different methods is not always helpful given the uneasy relationship between discourse and practice: participant observation may show people behaving in ways that contradict the beliefs they claim during interviews to hold.

[59] I chose not to use information gathered from them to avoid being accused of seeking out 'biased' ex-members and because I was more interested in current members.

wanted to examine a local congregation where men were not numerically dominant to discover how gender operates 'bottom up' as well as 'top down' – how women and men acquiesce to or struggle with NFI's public ideology.

Ethnographic observation

It is necessary first to distinguish between ethnography and ethnographic methods. Originating within anthropology, ethnography is 'the study of lived experience' (Brodkey 1987: 25), 'the art and science of describing a group or culture' (Fetterman 1989: 11) or, in Clifford Geertz's (1975: 19) familiar summation 'thick description': 'the ethnographer "inscribes" social discourse; he writes it down'. 'Ethnography' is an ambiguous term. It represents both 'process' (the act of research) and 'product' (the written account) (Agar 1996: 53-54). Ethnographies traditionally conform to three dimensions: time (an extensive period of fieldwork); breadth (a broad, holistic understanding of the context or culture they are investigating); and perspective (to understand the point of view of the researched) (Stringer 1999: 42-43). Alan Bryman (2001: x) selects as key features: '1) Ethnographers immerse themselves in a society 2) to collect descriptive data via fieldwork 3) concerning the culture of its members 4) from the perspective of the meanings members of that society attach to their social world 5) and render the collected data intelligible and significant to fellow academics and other readers'.

I prefer to call my thesis 'ethnographic' than '*an* ethnography'. Focussing on one theme – gender – it does not attempt to understand a whole culture. Some of the stipulations in ethnographers' handbooks were not applicable to this young, urban, middle-class evangelical culture with which I was already familiar.[60] The recommendation to stay at least a year (Okamura 1985: 10; Agar 1996: 244) is useful; fifteen months was long enough to build friendship and trust with participants and test whether developing theory harmonised with the data.

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[60] Defamiliarisation was therefore necessary. As Renato Rosaldo (1989: 39) cautions 'Social descriptions by, of, and for members of a particular culture require a relative emphasis on defamiliarization, so that they will appear – as in fact they are – humanly made, and not given in nature'. I needed to become an unknowing stranger, taking Agar's (1996: 242) 'student-child-apprentice learning role', asking questions in instances where I assumed a shared discourse (Stringer 2002: 3).

Participant observation was my main research technique. Participant observation means that 'you are actually there, that you enter the world of the people you're working with rather than bringing them into your world' (Agar 1996: 9). During participant observation 'an investigator establishes a many-sided and relatively long-term relationship with a human association in its natural setting, for the purposes of developing a scientific understanding of that association' (J. Lofland & L. Lofland 1984: 12). Its basic features are:

1. a special interest in human meaning and interaction as viewed from the perspective of people who are insiders or members of particular situations and settings;
2. location in the here and now of everyday life situations and settings as the foundation of inquiry and method;
3. a form of theory and theorizing stressing interpretation and understanding of human existence;
4. a logic and process of inquiry that is open-ended, flexible, opportunistic, and requires constant redefinition of what is problematic, based on facts gathered in concrete settings of human existence;
5. an in-depth, qualitative, case study approach and design;
6. the performance of a participant role or roles that involves establishing and maintaining relationships with natives in the field; and
7. the use of direct observation along with other methods of gathering information. (Jorgensen 1989: 13-14)

Participant observation is a method fraught with questions (acknowledged or not) of cultural difference, power, reflexivity and 'insider/outsider' positioning. Danny Jorgensen (1989: 12-13) identifies conditions where participant observation is particularly useful: 'little is known about the phenomenon'; 'there are important differences between the views of insiders as opposed to outsiders'; 'the phenomenon is somehow obscured from the view of outsiders'; and 'the phenomenon is hidden from public view'. These all apply to my research.[61]

Most of the few British studies of evangelicalism and gender mainly involved interview research (Luff 1996; Franks 1999, 2001; Baillie 2002; Porter 2002). Such researchers (e.g. Luff 1996, 1999; Franks 1999, 2001) sometimes call their work ethnographic. I consider this claim tenuous, since little sustained involvement with participants (other than a few hours' discussion and perhaps a cup of coffee) has occurred. I judge the engagement ethnographic research requires and which my study seeks to

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[61] Other texts on ethnographic research that have informed my thinking include Johnson 1990; Shaffir & Stebbins 1991; J. Lofland & L. Lofland 1995; Grills 1998b.

demonstrate much greater. Using mainly interviews to discover attitudes to gender is unlikely to reveal the important point Sally Gallagher (2003; Gallagher & Smith 1999) raises: evangelicals' attitudes and practices of gender often differ. Ethnographic research reveals the junction or disjunction between what is said and what is done. It enables exploration of discourses and the ways social actors locate themselves in relation to them.

Nicole Rodriguez Toulis' (1997) ethnographic work at a congregation from the Black Pentecostal denomination The New Testament Church of God, where she also conducted informal interviews, is one of two British studies comparable to mine methodologically. The other is my ethnographic research for my MA dissertation on the position of single women in a New Church congregation (Aune 1998). Participant observation and study of the church's literature formed the basis of that research; I also conducted structured interviews with six women.

The present study builds on my earlier work by extending the length, duration and focus of study. It gives room for a more detailed investigation, helped by the fifteen months spent with one congregation. It extends the subject of study from single women to evangelical gender practices more generally; in particular, this study considers masculinity as well as femininity and attends also to marriage. This attention to masculinity makes it almost unique among British research on contemporary evangelicalism and gender, which has thus far primarily considered women. Apart from my 1998 research, this is the first academic analysis of gender in the New Churches. It is probably also the first substantial ethnographic study of NFI.

Analysing documents and sermons

In literary cultures, ethnographers often include documents in their analyses (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 127-143). These might include informants' written accounts of their lives, fiction, letters or leaflets. I made much use of books, generally didactic, written by male NFI leaders and occasionally their wives and audiotaped sermons from NFI's summer festival Stoneleigh Bible Week. These I quote from extensively as examples of 'official' or public NFI discourse. I utilised NFI's quarterly magazine *NFI Magazine* and its 1975-1992 precursor *Restoration Magazine*, produced with other Restorationist networks. Pamphlets, leaflets and photocopied sheets given out at Westside to aid discussion or study,

were helpful, as were CDs of worship songs produced by NFI. I used the Internet to browse NFI churches' websites, and downloaded material (e.g. sermon notes) relating to gender. I decided to attend more to recent (post-1990) material, believing that would give a more accurate representation of contemporary NFI life, though I also quote from earlier material.

Access

I ruled out covert observation as unethical other than in exceptional cases (British Sociological Association 2002). I knew the achievability of an overt ethnographic study depended on a positive initial approach. I had previously conducted a study at a church I belonged to; this time I had no acquaintances to 'smooth the way'. I decided to write to Terry Virgo requesting permission to carry out my study. On my supervisor's advice I assured him that I was a Christian and was not out to 'discredit' NFI. Several months later Nigel Ring, NFI's chief administrator and international leadership team member, wrote granting permission and inviting me to their leaders' Prayer and Fasting event.

I then began visiting NFI congregations. On one visit to 'Eastside' (pseudonym), a congregation in an unfamiliar, working-class, area I was feeling out of place, not only because of my researcher status, but also because I felt conspicuously middle-class. I read on the notice-sheet that Chris and Sarah, a married couple, ran a midweek house group near where I lived. During post-meeting coffee the pastor, who I had approached to explain my research, took on a gatekeeping[62] role. He introduced me to Chris and Sarah, Mark and Jane, Jenny and Ruth. The two married couples appeared to be in their early thirties; I guessed Jenny was in her fifties and Ruth in her twenties. All were white. The pastor explained that the house group Chris led was an NFI 'church plant'[63]. Meeting these six I felt more comfortable. Culturally middle-class in dress and speech, they appeared to not entirely fit into the church. Though I felt I should see class as fragmenting, even dead (Beck 1992; Pakulski & Waters 1996), the markers of class identity we shared mattered to me.[64]

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[62] Gatekeepers are 'key personnel' with the power to allow or deny access (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 63-68).

[63] A small, newly-founded group that aims to grow into an established congregation.

[64] While NFI attract adherents from across the socio-economic spectrum, most are probably from the lower middle classes, a trend common in evangelicalism historically (Davidoff & Hall 1987). They are nearly all white and fairly young. They attract slightly more women than men, but their gender imbalance is much less pronounced than most Christian denominations (see Chapter 5).

Chris and Sarah expressed welcome and interest as I explained my plan to carry out a comparative study of two New Church networks.[65] Hearing me name the other I intended studying, Pioneer, Chris responded: 'Pioneer are much more releasing of women than New Frontiers. And within NFI, some churches are more releasing than others.' I was taken aback by his readiness to admit that women were held back within NFI. (I was to come across this word 'release' often, and discuss it in Chapter 4.) They introduced me to Jenny who, hearing about my research, immediately asked: 'gender roles or gender identity?' Again I was thrown. Lacking time to formulate an adequate response, I quickly answered, 'Both.'

With Jenny were Mark and Jane and their two young children. Jane told me that Mark had read *Restoring the Kingdom*, Andrew Walker's text on the House Church movement. She said Mark was a voracious reader of literature on church growth. Surprised – now for the third time – at their familiarity with study of the churches they were committed to, I was introduced to an Eastside leader who was unaware that I was a researcher and joked that since I had filled in the church welcome card 'we can get your money!' 'Careful,' Jane cautioned him in jest, 'she'll be writing this down: "NFI are very concerned with money. X said…"' At this fourth challenge to my prior assumptions in the space of about five minutes, I concluded that NFI members were a good deal more open, intelligent and thoughtful than I – in my academic arrogance – had expected. When Chris expressed enthusiasm that I study Westside, their 'church plant', explaining to me that it would be particularly interesting because I could watch it grow, I decided it might be a good place to start.

With Chris' permission, other Westside members were probably not free to deny me it. I regret not initially asking permission of all members. I was also discomforted that men (Terry Virgo, Nigel Ring, the Eastside pastor and Chris) took all initial gatekeeping roles, for it indicated that certain men possess right of access into NFI women's (and non-leading men's) lives that ordinary members lack. However, I felt confident, given NFI's structure and my prior experience researching a Restorationist congregation, that they would consider asking only the leader for permission the appropriate approach.

Introducing Westside

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[65] This plan was abandoned due to the wealth of data I collected at NFI, and because I decided one in-depth ethnographic study would yield more accurate data.

Located in a British city[66] Westside was 'planted' six months or so before fieldwork began, when Chris and Sarah moved to the city encouraged by leaders in their previous NFI church. When fieldwork began in 2000, Westside had twelve adult members,[67] eight of them female (five single women, three married women, three married men and one single man). When I departed fiftèen months later membership had doubled, and eighteen of the twenty-four were women (fourteen single women, four married women, four married men and two single men). Most Westsiders were in their twenties, with the exception of two couples (the leader Chris and his wife Sarah, and supporting leader Mark and his wife Jane) who were in their thirties, one single woman in her late fifties (Jenny) and a married couple (Harry and Ann) in their early sixties. All but three of the twenty-four were white and most would be considered middle-class.

Westside's 2001 'Vision, Values and Objectives' statement gives their 'over-arching vision' as 'to establish a large vibrant church in [location], in which we bless God, encourage each other, and reach others.' Eight values are listed:

- We give God room to move in all that we do.
- Prayer is the foundation to all that we do.
- The Bible is taught, understood and applied to our lives.
- Nothing is more important than personal integrity.
- Evangelism is a natural part of our lives.
- We worship God.
- We're generous with our money and other resources.
- Our style is relevant to the area where we live.

For the first six months activities centred around a weekly Wednesday evening 'house group' (occasionally called a 'small group' or 'cell group') at the homes of Chris and Sarah or Mark and Jane. The group then grew to become two, one led by Mark and Jane and one by a married couple in their late twenties, John and Rachel. House group meetings were informal; the two hours were spent chatting, studying the Bible, listening to a talk given by a group member, singing (called 'worship') and praying for and prophesying over each other. Nine months into my fieldwork Westside began monthly midweek evening collective

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[66] Identifying this city would risk the congregation's anonymity. I told Westside that I would not disclose the church's name or location and would fictionalise members' names. Revealing that Westside is an urban congregation is necessary because its urban setting accounts for some of its significant features, notably its high proportion of single people and its desire to understand homosexuality.

[67] By 'members' I mean regular attendees. Westside had no formal membership policy.

gatherings, known as 'altogether meetings'. Just after I left, they started a monthly Sunday service. During my fifteen months at Westside I participated in forty-three Westside church gatherings, of which thirty-nine were house groups and four 'altogether meetings'. I joined in other social events such as dinners, parties and trips to the pub.

'Is it representative?'

This question derives from assumptions that under postmodernist critiques become less significant. I have commented already on my use of several methods to ensure the validity and reliability of my findings; I address my use of quantitative analysis later. As regards this study's applicability to other NFI or evangelical churches, I do not claim that what I present is representative of an 'average' NFI church (though it may be). I opt for richness rather than representativeness. That said, the generalisability of my findings to other NFI congregations and to evangelicalism in general is worthy of comment. Westside was viewed by many of its members as less conservative than many NFI congregations because of its younger leaders, most of whom came from an NFI church known to be more liberal than 'average.' Its urban setting, constituency of primarily young professionals and its preponderance of single women (see Chapter 8) are also linked to its lesser conservatism. As a church plant, Westside was smaller than most NFI churches. Because small numbers enabled me to interview almost all the members (twenty out of twenty-four) I did not face the sampling problem of ensuring those I interviewed were representative of the congregation.[68] While Westside is not exactly indicative of the 'average' NFI church, visits to other NFI congregations confirmed theological and organisational similarities across all NFI churches that render the differences fairly small.

The generalisability, or external validity, of my findings to non-NFI evangelical churches is less obvious. As Chapter 1 intimates, evangelical churches are diverse, ranging across many denominations, with a loose set of core beliefs. As regards gender, evangelicals range from conservatism to egalitarianism, with most displaying a combination of

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[68] Of the four members I did not interview, one was a very marginal member who attended rarely and I had barely spoken to. One was a regular attendee who chose not to be interviewed (see later). Two were very new, having joined within two months of me beginning my interviews.

conservative and feminist approaches. As far as this research on NFI reveals this, it is indicative of other evangelical churches.

Recording ethnographic data

I neither used audio recording devices nor made notes during meetings, for I felt this would make Westsiders uncomfortable. To avoid forgetting telling occurrences I jotted these down in a notebook the moment I returned home. I spent two to three hours at the computer writing fieldnotes later in the evening or, if I was too tired, the next morning. The longer the time between the event and the formulation of a written description, the more I forgot (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 146), so I tried to write notes up as soon as possible (Okamura 1985: 11-15).

Throughout my fieldnotes I wrote down who attended each meeting, its structure and proceedings and who led each aspect. I incorporated my emotional responses to the evening's events. As time went on and categories were emerging I began to identify significant moments and comments more easily and describe them more precisely. I added questions to the fieldnotes and noted, in italicised script, new theoretical observations. I referred to group members using their initials. Someone's initials followed by quotation marks indicated that speech, either verbatim or approximated, would follow. When I was fairly sure I had recalled phrases verbatim I placed these in single quotation marks. I dated literature that was distributed, collecting it in a separate file (J. Lofland & L. Lofland 1995: 66-98).

Writing ethnographic accounts: the postmodern turn

Realists stress ethnography's ability to represent objectively the social reality of the group studied (Hammersley 1990: 59-64). The postmodern or 'rhetorical' (Hammersley 1993) turn represents a parallel crisis in ethnography to that raised by feminism (Behar 1995). Like feminist approaches, postmodern approaches emphasise reflexivity[69] (Marcus 1998: 181-202). James Clifford and George Marcus' (1986) anthology *Writing Culture*

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[69] Reflexivity involves ' making explicit the play of power relations in your research process, and...identifying your relationship to the researched' (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002: 158).

signalled the postmodern turn,[70] observing crucially that ethnographies are written documents, textual constructions.[71] As such they construct, rather than represent, 'reality'. Paul Atkinson (1992: 9) observes a 'triple constitution of the field': 'it is constructed through the ethnographer's gaze', 'it is reconstituted through his or her ability to construct a text-of-the-field' and 'it is reconstructed and recontextualized through the reader's work of interpretation and contextualization.' Celia Lury (1982) highlights the reader's role in recognising ethnographies as '*a version of* what happened' (my italics). Linda Brodkey (1987) highlights the disparity between experience and narration, as ethnographers are constantly, whether or not consciously, making decisions about how to structure the written ethnography.

In a world without stable truth ethnography becomes narrative fiction (Denzin 1996). Identifying postmodern ethnography as 'a cooperatively evolved text of fragments of discourse' with no predetermined form, Stephen Tyler (2001: 315) describes the potentially ethical character of ethnographic discourse. Rejecting totalising or synthesising 'framing stories', postmodern ethnography is 'polyphonic' (Tyler 2001: 316). Neither text, nor author or reader is primary. Because ethnography cannot represent reality, postmodernists suggest paying more attention to its aesthetic or political dimensions (Hammersley 1993). Yet postmodern ethnographies are not common (Tyler 2001: 324), perhaps because academic constraints dictate what constitutes 'acceptable' ethnography.

Agreeing with postmodernists that ethnographic texts construct the social world even as they claim to represent it, I seek to reveal the choices I made in writing this thesis. I value postmodernists' emphasis on shifting the balance of power to allow different voices to speak and interpret my constitution of 'reality', as feminist ethnographers also advocate. I wrote fieldnotes and this thesis not as a neutral observer but from my single Christian feminist standpoint; thus I made particular note of events denoting or connoting gender and singleness and tended not to query theological notions. I have likely been influenced by a desire for things to fit my 'postfeminism' framework. In using this framework I do what postmodernists disapprove of: I create a synthesising story. However, because I understand postfeminism as something that is not unitary but encompasses various strands, my account permits different voices to be heard: of NFI members who are gender-traditionalist; of those

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[70] Other significant texts include Marcus & Fischer 1986; Clifford 1988; Rose 1990; Marcus 1998, 1999.
[71] This contention appears in nascent form in some earlier anthropological writings (e.g. Geertz 1975).

who are feminist; of quiet group members who, even if they spoke little in a whole-group situation, were able at least to articulate their opinions during interview; of confident spokespeople (generally men) and NFI leaders; of myself as interpreter and writer. I hope readers will add their voices, interpretations and challenges. Suspicious like Margery Wolf (1992) that postmodern ethnographers' experimental writing may obstruct understanding, particularly for those who are not academic, and thus increase divisions and inequalities between academics and readers/informants, I have used a conventional writing style.

Personal identity and social relations at Westside

Although poststructuralists thoroughly interrogate identity binaries (male/female, white/black etc.), this rarely occurs in the ethnographic setting, where 'who you are' in informants' eyes effects how researchers are perceived, the access they gain and the knowledge they produce. Gender, ethnicity, social class, age, dress and other variables, as well as participants' prior conceptions of social research, are influential (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 77-104). As Agar (1996: 91) writes,

> a social category will be assigned to the ethnographer by the group members. The category may change over time, but one will always exist. As the ethnographer's role is defined and redefined, it will guide group members in their dealings with him or her. Their expectations of what the ethnographer wants to learn – and their decisions about what should be told – will derive partly from their sense of who he or she is.

Junker (1960: 36) has mapped the various roles participant observers adopt, from 'complete observer' and 'observer as participant' strategies of 'objective detachment', through 'participant as observer' to 'complete participant' strategies of 'subjective involvement'.[72] Ethnographers take different positions on the 'emic' (insider, of group members) and 'etic' (outsider, of social scientists) spectrum (McCutcheon 1999; Arweck & Stringer 2002): most combine both and some reject this dichotomy (Pike 1967; Fetterman 1989: 30-32; Waterhouse 2002). I regard the emic-etic paradigm as simplistic. I moved between roles, sometimes drawing closer, sometimes drawing back as I reasoned was necessary or as guided by my emotions. I sometimes felt close to (some) Westside members,

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[72] Junker unfortunately conflates the question of openness/secrecy with degree of involvement and personal membership of the group (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 96).

sometimes distanced or antipathetic. I avoided attending Westside for several weeks early on because of the stress I was feeling there.[73] Although I dislike some of Malinowski's (1989) diary entries I initially felt a similar loathing for Westside and desire to withdraw. There are degrees of 'insiderness,' degrees of sharing of subcultural capital.[74] I eventually became so immersed in NFI's discourses as to make me more of an insider than some Westside members, especially those who had not long been churchgoers.

Sharing a Christian identity: its effect on the research

My Christian identification helped me achieve an insider perspective, while differences in my theological understandings and attitudes to gender drew me towards, and enabled me to be constructed as having, an outsider perspective. As one NFI man helpfully described it, playing on the phrase 'in, but not of, the world' evangelicals use to sum up 'ideal' Christian engagement with society, I was 'in, but not of, the group.'

Scott Grills (1998a) discusses the difficulty of trying to do 'nonpartisan' research with participants who see the world through a dualistic lens and people as 'for' or 'against' them; evangelicals often do this. At the first leaders' Prayer and Fasting gathering I was invited to attend Steve Blaber told the few hundred present that I was attending the event to interview some of them. His next words 'She's for us. She's not a threat, so talk to her' revealed that while I never understood or presented my research as being 'for' or 'against' NFI, NFI members considered that by being a self-identified evangelical Christian I was 'for' them.[75] (I am conscious that this account, in not being explicitly 'for' NFI, may be seen as a betrayal).

The construction of the researcher as a young, needy, attractive, single woman

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[73] Emotional and physical symptoms of anxiety are not unusual among ethnographers (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983: 100-102; J. Lofland & L. Lofland 1995: 47-53).

[74] See Pete Ward's 1996 work on the evangelical subculture.

[75] In his participant observation at an evangelical church Mathew Guest (2002: 43) was regularly asked whether he was a Christian. He observes: 'These initial reactions shed light on the boundaries manifest in each group, which separate insiders from outsiders, and on the criteria upon which this division stands. Although the evangelicals welcomed me, their rhetoric suggested that they conceived my identity as categorically different from their own. I may have shared common ground with many members of the congregation – not least a university education and a knowledge of theology – but the categorical dichotomy of Christian/non-Christian was a perpetual reminder of my being different, an outsider.'

'How the gender identity of the fieldworker shapes both their participation in and their analysis of social relations' (Cole & Phillips 1995: 8) is often discussed.[76] Existing literature stresses several themes salient in my own research. Female researchers are more able to form fruitful relations with female group members (particularly in gender-segregated settings) and develop fuller understandings of women's experiences. Female researchers are less likely to be seen as authoritative academics and may face less opposition, since their research is not considered particularly important. Female researchers are often assigned 'fictive kin' roles, perhaps as honorary daughters (particularly in family-centred cultures). Married and unmarried female researchers may be interpreted differently. Marriage often signifies adulthood, according the researcher respect and her husband's help in reporting details of male-only settings (Pettigrew 1981). Being unmarried, conversely (though less often in western cultures) signifies immaturity, attracting fascination and attempts to find the researcher a male partner (Karim 1993; Davis 1986). Single female researchers are occasionally treated as honorary males (Warren & Hackney 2000: 15-17). Researchers discuss less often variables like ethnicity, class, marital status, sexuality, ablebodiedness, age or religion. This attention to gender and sometimes to other variables is important. What is also needed is acknowledgement that participants construct researchers according to multiple locations – in my case, as a young, needy, attractive, single woman.

I discuss in Chapter 8 how women's singleness is constructed in postfeminist contemporary Britain as a marginal, waiting state. Yet I note that in a context where singleness is increasing, positive portrayals that give women agency join these 'separate spheres' conceptions. While NFI utilise both conceptions, they stress far more the waiting discourse. Westside members' construction of me as a young, needy, attractive, single woman accorded with these findings. While they sometimes portrayed me as authoritative, intelligent and academic, the dominant construction was the first. And when Westside portrayed me as academic, it was often as *too* academic.

Westside identified me not just as a researcher, but also as a young woman needing companionship and spiritual and emotional support. They used prophecy – which they

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[76] Here I am talking about how participants' gendered interpretations of researchers influence their field experience, not about feminist ethnographic research. Texts exploring the former include Morgan 1981, Golde 1986, Whitehead & Conaway 1986, Warren 1988, Okely & Callaway 1992, Bell et al. 1993, Knott 1995, Warren & Hackney 2000. My generalisations in the next paragraph about women's experience as fieldworkers derive mainly from these texts.

understand as a (often personal) message for others that God impresses upon an individual – to work through understandings of me as both needy and intellectual. In the following incident, which occurred five months into my fieldwork, Westside participants make clear their preference for the former view and challenge my academic separation from them. I quote in full from my fieldnotes, adding, in italics, the notes I included about my emotional reactions to the incident.

> At 9.50 Chris said 'let's prophesy over someone rather than having worship. Let's prophesy over Kristin.' Someone said they'd picked on me before, and I said it was fine if they wanted to, but if someone else would like prophecy, they should prophesy over them.
>
> Chris told me to shut my eyes so I can't see them all staring at me. I shut my eyes and stay sitting on the sofa.
>
> Chris: 'You're not used to having friends and people lavish themselves on you, and aren't used to people helping you, and God wants to lavish himself on you.'
>
> Sarah: 'I see a picture of Goldilocks sneaking around, tiptoeing around a house and trying all the keys. It's like that for you, you don't feel a part of what's going on or that you should be there. You feel like you're in the way. But God wants you to know that it's your house and you don't need to tiptoe around'.
>
> [*It's obvious that this refers to my relationship with their church, and I imagine Sarah realises it, but doesn't say it, maybe because she thinks she shouldn't force things.]*
>
> Chris: 'God wants to give you gifts of the Holy Spirit that you've not had before. He wants it to flow out of you so your mind doesn't stop it and he wants you to know that you're not going to go off track because you're not that kind of person. Is that what you thought, Sarah?'
>
> Sarah: 'Some of it, but not all.'
>
> Sarah asks me if I know what the prophecy refers to. I say nothing comes to mind, but maybe it will.
>
> Jane: 'I see a picture of a laboratory and it's cold and clinical and there's this brain in a case and it's like God's saying you see yourself as a brain, but you're not just a brain, you're a whole person.'
>
> Imogen: 'I don't know if this is right, but I think God's saying that he doesn't want you just to have an academic life and to know him academically and do everything academically but he wants you to really have more of a spiritual aspect to your life.'
>
> At this point I start to cry.
>
> [*I don't exactly know why. Because I've got closed eyes and feel under pressure. Because I was upset that this was what they thought of me and of my spiritual life. They interpreted the crying as God touching me and I felt compelled to nod as if I agreed...It could also be read as to do with their problem with single women. They can't cope with them being 'mature' and 'together', as Jane earlier described me. They need me to be dependent on the group.]*
>
> Chris asks Jane to pray. Sarah gives me a tissue and, when Jane stops, Chris says he thinks someone should pray some more for me. So Jane continues and

> Imogen comes also to pray. They 'pray in' some of the things that came from the prophecy. Imogen prays about how I've got lots of potential to do creative things in lots of areas.
>
> After this is over Chris comments, 'that's why I love prophecy, to see God touching people'.

Each person described me as needy: for Chris I need the lavish love of God and others and the 'gifts of the Holy Spirit'; for Sarah I feel excluded from what is happening; for Jane I lack an emotional and holistic self-understanding; for Imogen I lack spiritually. This need is gendered and aged: the Goldilocks prophecy picturing me as a young fairytale girl took centre-stage as Sarah seeks an interpretation of its relevance to my life. This I was unwilling to provide, fearing the 'God want you to…' corollary advising me to see Westside as somewhere I belonged. This incident problematises the academic self-presentation these Westside members understand me as portraying, breaks it (and me emotionally) down and attempts to replace it with a self-understanding that is wedded to their church emotionally, relationally and spiritually. I am not simply left empty and needy, though, as Imogen assures me that renouncing academic achievement will open up (perhaps more conventionally feminine) 'creative' abilities.

I quickly became aware of being categorised as one of the large group of young single women at Westside. I was probably of the easiest gendered, ethnic, marital, age and class location to gain access and form reciprocal friendships with participants. I began the research aged 24; most of the single women were similarly aged, which enabled me to be 'slotted in' and accepted socially. The single women welcomed me, becoming my allies and 'key informants' (J. Lofland & L. Lofland 1995: 61). I occasionally cooked a meal for one or two of them before going to the house group, or they cooked for me, and I attended a couple of their birthday parties. Jenny, the older single woman, was my strongest ally; it was she who enabled me to see the meanings, costs and benefits of resistance to dominant, conservative notions of femininity. But 'fitting in' had disadvantages; I felt uncomfortable with Westside's construction of me and feared that I had overstepped professional boundaries and become too close to them. Additionally, my single, childless status hindered my access to Westside members who were married and had children. As Kerry Daly and Anna Dienhart (1998) remark, the continued notion of family as a private space makes family research difficult; it is even more so for researchers who cannot communicate on the basis of shared

family experiences. Even though I occasionally visited the married people's homes for meals and babysat for their children I did not build close relationships with them.

Despite my stated happiness being single Westside viewed me as a woman who because she was single needed a husband, and because of her youth and attractiveness would probably find one. When Jenny heard that my new flatmate was male, she joked that she would tell him: 'Kristin needs a man.' Driving back from a Sunday service at Eastside, Jane told me she had been considering whether Eastside had any eligible men I would be interested in, but concluded that the only possible man was 'not intellectual enough.' A couple of months into my fieldwork Chris informed me, in front of the group, 'We were discussing who you're going to marry the other day.' Jane confirmed this, and Chris added: 'We were wondering if you'd have to marry someone intellectual with a Ph.D. or something.' Though I felt annoyed at the assumption that I would marry, I did not challenge it, and agreed, 'I wouldn't want to be more intelligent than the person I married'. During a house group meeting six months later John asked everyone to say what gifts or talents they had, and how they were currently using them. When my turn arrived, I mentioned writing, and explained that I was writing a book on single women and the church. Rachel, Simon's wife, commented: 'Better do that before you get married.'

I rarely countered Westside's assumptions about my likely marriage. Jenny's comments were the only ones I challenged, and these only in small, informal settings where I felt less powerless; in the whole group setting, and to Chris, whose role as leader I was conscious of, I lacked the courage. I feel aggrieved that I colluded in these constructions of me, embarrassed that I upheld the old notion that married women should not be more educated or wealthy than their husbands. I am, though, interested in how and why I felt unable to voice disagreement and conscious of the difficulty of voicing a feminist perspective in a group for whom gender conservatism constituted their general practice of everyday life.

Conforming to group norms in physical appearance can be advantageous in gaining a group's confidence (Grills 1998a: 84; Warren & Hackney 2000: 22). My dress was unintentionally typical of young NFI women, marking me out as non-threatening. In Chapter 7 I discuss a particularly uncomfortable incident at which Simon jokingly suggested showing men on the streets photos of 'the girls in the group', explicitly naming me, as a method of attracting men to the church. In Chapter 8 I describe being called a 'pretty girl' and a 'babe'.

As Chapter 5 demonstrates, I, like several other young women, was given several prophecies telling me that God saw me as beautiful or was making me more (spiritually?) beautiful.

These assumptions about my physical appearance and likely marriage represent a particular sexualisation of me. Sexuality has often been ignored as a dimension of fieldwork rather than used reflexively as a source of knowledge about the group studied (Kulick & Wilson 1995). The question 'What are the implications of the anthropologist as a sexually cognizant knower?' (Kulick 1995: 5) needs to be asked, the reality recognised that 'in the field we are even less free than elsewhere to construct our own sexuality – it is largely constructed for us and sometimes in spite of us' (Caplan 1993: 23-24). Westside's constructions of me and certain other young women demonstrate a (benign) objectification, a sense that women are and should be sexually available to men within particular constraints (namely Christian marriage). When I felt myself embody it, I was newly conscious that in a church with almost no single men, coupling this construction of young women as heterosexually attractive and available with prohibitions around celibacy and marrying non-Christian men was problematic and probably unsustainable. I explore this in Chapter 8 and observe in the Conclusion the consequences of this for Westside single women.

Researchers' feelings about themselves may alter according to participants' behaviour towards and interpretation of them (Warren & Hackney 2000: 21). As I found myself treated as needing Westside's emotional support and a male partner, I experienced inward anger *and* began to suspect they were right: that I was insufficient, too independent and needing Westside's loving support. I understood personally how discourses create subjectivity; while I disliked the waiting discourse of singleness, I still felt myself 'subjectified' (Foucault 1982) through it. I address my fleeting temptation to stay at Westside that arose from their construction of me as needing them in the Conclusion.

<u>Moments of power</u>

Occasionally, however, I felt myself perceived as an 'honorary male'. I sometimes discussed theology with Mark, who regarded me as one of the few theologically knowledgeable people at Westside. If I were a member I would be given leadership

responsibility, he indicated.[77] Introducing me to someone I had not met, Chris sometimes said, quasi-humorously, 'This is Kristin, she's very clever.' I was never sure of his seriousness, nor of whether the comment demonstrated his discomfort with a younger, more educated, woman. Yet it gave me status. Six months into my fieldwork Jenny told me Chris had confessed his worries about my Ph.D. 'Have NFI really given her *carte blanche* to write whatever she wants?' he reportedly asked Jenny. He was, Jenny said, worried that I would recommend that NFI allow women to be elders. Before I interviewed him, Chris admitted that he was worried that my research might discredit his leadership in his NFI overseers' eyes; this worry had become more salient as he had begun to be paid part time by NFI for his work. He told me:

> From time to time I get worried about your Ph.D. I've mentioned it to the [regional leadership] team and they don't seem worried, and I guess if New Frontiers are being so open and aren't worried about it, I shouldn't be. But I think about my job, with me going one day a week now and if what you say is critical it might have an effect on my job.

In contrast to my powerlessness at their construction of me as needy, this incident made visible the reciprocal nature of power. Despite the fact that I perceived Chris as an authority figure, as an older, male, church leader and my gatekeeper, he feared that my thesis could lead NFI to dismiss him as leader.

Structured interviews

At the end of my fieldwork I conducted interviews with twenty Westside members. Social research interviewing encompasses a wide range of styles and strategies, but can be classified according to the degree of structuring (Denzin 1970: 123). My interviews were structured (see Appendix 1 for questions); I occasionally inserted comments and questions. I worked with (though was not uncritical of) three assumptions of structured interviewing adapted from Denzin (1970: 123-124). First, interviewees have a sufficiently shared vocabulary for questions to be assembled and worded in a set form everyone involved will

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[77] When I was leaving, and several group members tried gently to convince me to stay and become a member, Mark commented in an email that Westside's leaders wished they had been able to ask me to lead parts of meetings.

understand. Second, the same context should be created: questions should be ordered identically, with interesting questions placed earlier on and difficult or more emotional ones nearer the end. Third, pilot interviewing and question refinement help form a question schedule that meets the other assumptions.

As members of the same church and nearly all white, British and middle-class I assumed shared vocabulary and understanding. This proved largely, but not entirely, correct: several of my interviewees had not been churchgoers or NFI members for long and two were not British. The interview situation depends upon the 'linguistic competences' (Mishler 1986: 137) of interviewer and interviewee, and in at least one question I failed to recognise lack of shared terminology. In asking: 'Do you think Christian masculinity should be different from Christian femininity?' I has not realised how little NFI used the terms 'masculinity' and 'femininity' and that they never used the adjective 'Christian' in conjunction with 'masculinity' or 'femininity'. When my first interviewee requested clarification, I realised that I should have instead said 'biblical' or 'godly' 'manhood' and 'womanhood'. However, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Piper & Grudem 1991) is the title of a book well-known in evangelical circles as an exposition of gender conservatism and I wanted to avoid them thinking of this book and answering in the affirmative because these authors do. From then on I added something like: 'if you were a Christian man and you wanted to be godly would you be aiming at a different ideal from a Christian woman who wanted to be godly?' Though uncomfortable with my somewhat manipulative ordering of questions, I kept controversial questions about sexuality and gender issues within Westside until the middle and end of the interview because I wanted interviewees first to become confident by sharing their views on less controversial topics. I did not conduct pilot interviews, but I refined my questions with my supervisor.

Qualitative researchers, particularly feminists (Oakley 1981), often criticise structured interviewing. They believe it institutes formality and hierarchy that prevent reciprocal relations between interviewer and interviewee. They criticise it for imposing the researcher's agenda, pre-formed theories and interests on the encounter, stifling the interviewee's concerns. They prefer unstructured or semi-structured formats (H. Rubin & I. Rubin 1995; Pawson 1996) and understand interviews as forms of discourse and sites of negotiated meaning (Mishler 1986). I accept these criticisms. If empowering interviewees means allowing them to construct their own narrative of their experience (Mishler 1986: 66-135),

structured interviews rarely allow this. It is undoubtedly true that the structured format and tape recorder inhibited some Westsiders. A few of them seemed to speak more formally than they did normally; two women seemed nervous and gave short interviews; one spoke disjointedly, making it difficult to discern the points she was trying to express. I partially regret adhering to such a structured format.

Yet structured interviews aided data collection, enabling me to compare twenty responses to the same questions. I could then 'map' attitudes to gender on a spectrum (see Chapter 8). Furthermore, since most of my data emerged through unstructured observation, structured interviews proved a useful contrast. These interviews enabled me to challenge or 'validate generalizations arrived at through participant observation' (Okamura 1985: 18). I do not accept that structured interviews necessarily obstruct feminist values of mutuality, just as I accept that 'true' mutuality is never possible in such socially constructed encounters (Ribbens 1989). Conducting structured interviews did not erase my single Christian feminist standpoint (DeVault 1990). Moreover, I am wary that those who see interviews in terms of a structured/unstructured binary overlook the subtle ways in which interviewers structure 'unstructured' interviews (Collins 1998; Letherby 2003: 84). The assumption that structured interviewers possess power while interviewees do not is suspect. While the balance of power may well lie in favour of the researcher, power is always reciprocal (Cotterill 1992). Since interviews occurred in the context of an established rapport between Westsiders and me, the interview situation only in a minor way subverted existing relations between us. Westside did not consider me an authoritative, powerful researcher, so it was unlikely that structured interviewing would confer upon me this role. There was no possibility of me as 'researcher' interviewing them as 'subjects', 'informants' or 'respondents' (Johnson 1990: 10); rather, I as Kristin interviewed them as Marion, Tom or Dawn. The reciprocal nature of power was apparent when Chris asked if he could stay in the room while I was interviewing his wife, who said she was happy for him to be there. Mindful that his presence might restrict her responses, I wanted to interview her individually. But I felt unable to refuse Chris permission to stay.

Wanting to represent as closely as possible what I recorded, I transcribed each interview word-for-word, including hesitations and features such as laughter. I consider it important to not to 'tidy up' participants' speech. Mindful of stereotypical notions of evangelical Christians as dogmatists who confidently recite well-learned ideological scripts,

making visible their hesitations refutes such stereotypes. I transcribed in standard written English. Because of their largely middle-class constituency, participants did not use local dialect and rarely used slang. Lacking linguistic training, I did not attempt phonetic transcription (Atkinson 1992: 25-29).

Counting, or 'quantifying qualitative data'[78]

In a late-modern society still supportive of bureaucracy and science, numbers are powerful (Cicourel 1964). They are too for evangelicals, rooted as evangelicalism is in modernity's Enlightenment rationalism (Bebbington 1989). Because for some numbers speak louder than qualitative data, counting can usefully be incorporated into qualitative research (Silverman 1993: 162-165; J. Lofland & L. Lofland 1995: 127).

While most of my data collection was qualitative and most analysis interpretative I made several counts. I calculated from the interview transcripts the number of people responding to questions in broadly similar ways and recorded in my fieldnotes the frequency with which certain events occurred (for example, who attended and led each meeting). I used this information to generate statistics showing whether men or women participated in particular activities more often and how this proportionately related to the frequency of their attendance. These statistics complemented and verified my observations.

I paid little attention to ensuring proportionality as regards the comments from interviews and ethnographic observation I selected for inclusion in this thesis. Gratifyingly, a count after the fieldwork chapters were in draft form revealed that I had given voice to male and female Westside members in a remarkably representative way. I discovered that 70% of the interview quotations I had selected were uttered by women; this matched attendance at meetings, where women made up 70% of participants. My ethnographic (rather than interview) material seems to privilege women's voices slightly (55-60% of the speech I report is women's), but proportionate to men's lower attendance it is weighted slightly in favour of men. Given that social interaction in the congregation was less than egalitarian – men were normally more vocal than women – this is unsurprising. Overall, although women were marginalised vocally during Westside meetings, especially with regard to opportunities

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[78] Strauss & Corbin 1998: 11.

for active participation and leadership, my thesis gives them a voice more consistent with their numerical presence.

Ethical concerns

Informed consent, confidentiality and consequences[79]

While the danger exists that requesting the interviewee to sign a consent form 'contribute[s] to establishing a sense of authority and dominance in the interviewing[80] relationship' (Seidman 1998: 60), participants should be able to give (or withhold) informed consent. It was not until the interview stage that I asked Westsiders to sign a consent form. The form outlined the aim of the research and the format the interview would take. It made explicit the voluntary nature of the study, telling participants: 'You may at any time withdraw from the study without giving your reasons.' It included my commitment to disguising Westside's name and location and interviewees' names, exact ages and occupations in my thesis and subsequent publications.[81] Although I did not state this on the consent form I made a decision not to share my interview tapes or transcripts, or their location amongst my possessions, with anyone. To protect group members I added: 'due to the relatively small number of people in [Westside], you may still be able to identify each other's responses. If you make a remark which you do not wish other [Westside] members to be able to link to you, please specifically request that your pseudonym is not attributed to it.' On only two occasions did people do this. Accompanying the form, which I distributed a week before the interviews, were the questions I would ask in the interview. Showing Westsiders the questions enabled those who wanted to to formulate their responses beforehand. It helped create an interview situation in which participants were informed about what would happen.

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[79] Kvale (1996: 112-117) lists these three as important ethical guidelines. I also attempted to follow the British Sociological Association's (2002) statement of ethical practice.

[80] And ethnographic.

[81] Because significant alterations to ages and occupations, where mentioned, would have removed or distorted the influence of these identity variables, the age group and socio-economic brackets were not changed. As my consent form said, 'Polly (26), personnel manager, might become Anna (27), marketing manager'.

I regret that I did not request consent as I began participant observation. I was not sufficiently scrupulous about informing everyone who joined Westside after I began my research that I was not an 'ordinary' member; I participated enough in prayers and discussions to be mistaken for one. That this occurred became evident from the reaction of one woman who had been at Westside for about six months when I announced that I wanted to begin interviewing people. Although she knew my Ph.D. topic she had not connected my presence at Westside with my Ph.D. and I had neglected to make it explicit. We conversed via email about this misunderstanding and she said she was not willing to be interviewed. She wrote:

> I knew of course that you were doing your Ph.D. on NFI but I didn't realise until Wednesday that Westside was the study group. I suspect that in the rush of things, everyone forgot to mention it. To be honest, I feel uncomfortable to act as a subject when I didn't know about it, so I hope you don't mind if I ask not to be included in the research. I just need to think of cell group as a place where I can kick my shoes off and relax and not think too hard about what I am saying.

If this request for non-participation had come from someone whose comments were key to group activities and discussions, it could have prevented me mentioning important incidents. Thankfully, this woman was quiet and not mentioning her barely altered my content. Another problem was that the consent form did not make explicit enough participants' right to decline to participate in the ethnographic research.

During my research I encountered a piece of information that was intriguing, useful and illustrative. However, revealing it would have risked the anonymity and well-being of the person(s) it concerned who did not, I think, want it known within Westside. As Stacey (1988) discusses, it is frustrating to gloss over aspects of people's lives that reveal fallibility, messiness and difficulty with conforming to group behavioural norms in favour of a kind of collusive silencing of certain experiences. However, out of respect for them I gave verbal assurance to those who were aware of it that I would not reveal it in my thesis. Positively, it is arguable that silence about this is the most accurate representation of the way this information is dealt with in Westside.

Was I doing feminist research?

What makes research feminist? Many suggestions have been advanced since the early 'research on, with and for women' (Kelly et al. 1994: 29; see also Reinharz 1992; Maynard & Purvis 1994). Stanley and Wise (1990: 21) list three features of early feminist research: 1) it was 'defined as a focus *on* women, in research carried out *by* women who were feminist, *for other* women'; 2) qualitative methods were privileged;[82] 3) it was 'overtly political in its purpose and committed to changing women's lives'. For Sandra Harding (1987a: 6-10) there are key 'methodological features' but no single 'feminist method'. Feminist research possesses 'new empirical and theoretical resources: women's experiences'; is oriented to 'new purposes' in being 'for women'; and 'locat[es] the researcher in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter', offering for scrutiny not only the aspect of social life under investigation but also the investigator and her/his methodology. By investigating 'private' aspects of social life (like intimate relationships and motherhood) and choosing qualitative methods, feminist researchers sometimes feel they work 'on the edges of...dominant understandings of what constitutes "proper" research' (Edwards & Ribbens 1998: 4).

I wanted, where possible, to conduct feminist research. Whether I *was* doing so is not the only question that needs answering; more fundamental is Stacey's (1988) 'Can there be a feminist ethnography?' (see also Abu-Lughod 1990; Bell 1993). Elsewhere, Stacey and Thorne (1985) note the lack of feminist ethnographies, while Reinharz (1992: 46-75) counters with the claim that feminist ethnographies can and do exist. Stacey's question is also asked in anthropology, where postcolonial critics criticise feminist anthropology's 'essentialist assumptions about women which privilege the views of Western women and its tendency to homogenize the experiences of women in the "rest of the world"' (Cole & Phillips 1995: 3; Strathern 1987).

Ethnography, contends Stacey (1988), is often considered feminist because it involves more egalitarian relationships between researchers and researched. But drawing on critiques

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[82]Ann Oakley 1998 claims the prevalence of a 'gendered paradigm divide' associating qualitative methods and in-depth analysis with feminine approaches and quantitative methods with masculine approaches. She argues that qualitative research methods have been seen as the primary characteristic of feminist research. Criticising this qualitative/quantitative divide, she argues instead that 'the critical question remains the appropriateness of the method to the research question' (Oakley 1998: 724). Letherby (2004a: 175) critiques Oakley, arguing that feminist researchers' primary concern is with 'the relationship between the process and product,...i.e. how what we do affects what we get'. See also Oakley 2004 and Letherby 2004b.

by poststructuralist ethnographers she argues that mutuality may increase the harm experienced by participants who open up their lives to the researcher more than in less relational research. Participants may reveal personal information they later regret sharing. The researcher, not the participants, controls how participants' lives are represented. Participants may feel exploited, betrayed and abandoned when the researcher, who is freer to leave than the researched, departs. Stacey (1988: 26) rejects the possibility of a 'fully feminist ethnography', though she recommends '"partially" feminist ethnography':

> there can be (indeed there are) ethnographies that are partially feminist, accounts of culture enhanced by the application of feminist perspectives. There also can and should be feminist research that is rigorously self-aware and therefore humble about the partiality of its ethnographic vision and its capacity to represent self and other. Moreover…I believe the potential benefits of 'partially' feminist ethnography seem worth the serious moral costs involved.

My feminist activities in challenging women's marginality within evangelicalism were not without influence on Westside and my research ethics. I was concerned that my feminist position –occasionally visible to Westside members – would reduce their openness to me. Those who had more conservative ideas about gender might be hostile, wary or reluctant to express them, I worried. It is commonplace for ethical guidelines to recommend research only be conducted if the benefits to research participants are as many as, preferably more than, the drawbacks (Kvale 1996: 116). I worried about how to justify the possibility that the position of some (privileged) participants – men particularly – would worsen if women negotiated greater leadership opportunities and single women's status was equalised. But as Kelly et al. (1994: 37-38) ask of the belief that research should empower participants, should it also empower the privileged, the racist, the sexist, the homophobic, the classist? This quandary calls into question attempts of researchers to benefit 'the researched' as if they were a homogeneous group with the same needs – they are not. If my feminist orientation made conservative members wary or threatened to 'harm' the privileged, it reassured and sought to benefit the marginalised. Westside women with feminist orientations were more eager to confide in me their struggles with NFI's prohibition of women's 'governmental' church leadership.

Furthermore, since NFI members are principled people who strive to be 'biblical', they appeared to respect my feminist principles insofar as I claimed them as 'biblical'. They

occasionally saw my research as God-directed. In one of my last meetings Marion, whose views on gender were among the most conservative, gave me a prophecy in which she saw God rewriting my thesis:

> I don't know if this is just because we've been talking about it, so it might not be right, but I felt like God wanted to anoint your studying and I saw a picture of you sitting at your desk with all your books and all this rain coming down onto the page and God erasing what you'd written and then writing it all again. I was thinking of that [Bible] verse that says 'my tongue is the pen of a skilful writer' and of you sitting down with Jesus and having discussions and him telling you what he thinks.

While this reveals uneasiness about my conclusions, her confidence that God would ensure that 'his' conclusions prevailed is also measure of her contentment. Many Westsiders were concerned to ensure they were 'biblical' in their gender practices and Chris invited me to contribute to a forthcoming discussion group which would focus on ensuring they were involving women as they should.[83] The single women who wanted congregational gender equality believed my study would bring about change. 'When I discovered the three men were getting together and having their leadership meetings I thought, "why is it just men?" I'm quite a feminist', Imogen told me when I interviewed her. 'What am I doing in a church that doesn't believe women should be leaders? Maybe I should go somewhere else.' She prayed aloud after the interview. Saying that she had been struck by how important my thesis could be she prayed it would effect change in the church.

So while I concur with Stacey (1988) that fully feminist ethnography is not possible, I identify my project as feminist along the lines Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002: 147) suggest. Despite complex differences among women and postmodernist challenges to the categories 'feminism' and 'women', they believe: 'Research projects can be thought of as feminist if they are framed by feminist theory, and aim to produce knowledge that will be useful for effective transformation of gendered injustice and subordination.' Given some Westside women's support for what I understand as gender injustice, it is hard to make simplistic claims to represent all women's interests. I make only the claim that counter to some of their interpretations I believe that they would be better served if NFI rejected 'male headship' and removed prohibitions against overall female church leaders. I hope that, in detailing NFI's gender ideologies and practices and, crucially, in revealing them as socially

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[83] This discussion group never materialised.

constructed rather than 'natural' or 'biblical' they may become convinced of this. I believe this is possible, for my own interest in and subsequent commitment to feminism and its intersection with religion was provoked when a feminist academic, Myfanwy Franks, interviewed me nearly a decade ago for her Ph.D. study on women who join revivalist religious groups (Franks 1999, 2001). I therefore consider (and I use Christian terminology ironically) conservative evangelical women capable of 'redemption' in feminist terms.[84]

Endorsing Marcia-Lees et al.'s (1989) contention that feminist ethnography gives more political potential for changing social conditions than postmodern ethnography I want to produce an account that reveals the voices of the powerless and encourages transformation of conditions of inequality. If reading feminist academic research can contribute, as it did for me, to a process of 'conscientization' (Freire 1972), or, in second-wave feminist terms, 'consciousness raising', I hope this account of NFI and Westside will reveal for NFI members the times when they structure their lives in ways that do not liberate and suggest the possibility of resistance.

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[84] Franks (2001: 44) herself notes 'traces of religiosity within the Western secular feminist project'.

Chapter 3

The Emergence of Postfeminism

Introduction

Beginning by delineating the position I take regarding the origin and operation of gender in contemporary Britain, this chapter introduces my theoretical framework. Reviewing existing understandings of postfeminism, it argues for its use as a framework for understanding how gender is 'done' in contemporary Britain and, for this thesis, in NFI.

Theorising gender

Since second-wave feminism's influence on scholarship, theorising gendered social relations and cultural constructions has been a significant concern. Yet sex and gender have long generated discussion amongst the medical profession, writers, political and religious ideologues and 'lay people' of all kinds. A major concern of these gender theorists has been to account for what gender is and does, for its 'origin', operation and characteristics. My task in this section is to give a brief account of explanations concerning these features of gender. Since I locate my thesis within feminist theories of gender construction, I will concentrate on feminist gender theory.

I shall later argue that social changes that occurred during modernity are among key elements influencing current 'postfeminist' discourse and practice. It is therefore important to observe the changes that occurred in understandings of gendered bodies at modernity. Thomas Laqueur (1990; Fausto-Sterling 2000) describes the move from a 'one sex' view of women's bodies as lesser and reversed versions of men's (the vagina was a penis turned inside out) to a 'two sex' model in the late eighteenth century. Subsequently critiqued as 'essentialist' because it viewed things and people as possessing 'their own particular essence or nature' which 'determines what they can and cannot do' (Burr 1995: 19-20), this new

model assumed men and women were diametrically opposite and composed of entirely different natures. The debate between essentialism (prominent from the late eighteenth century) and social constructionism (identified particularly with second-wave feminist theorising) may be the most significant within gender theory (if 'theory' can also denote non-academic theorising) (Fuss 1989). While social and feminist theorists strongly challenge the view that gender and gender differences are the 'natural' results of unchangeable 'biology', essentialism continues its influence today. It has been reasserted, partly in the form of sociobiology, as part of a recent backlash against feminism (Moir & Jessel 1989; A. Moir & B. Moir 1998; Gray 1992; A. Pease & B. Pease 2001, 2002, 2003).

At the turn of the twentieth century scientists working in the burgeoning professions of sexology and psychoanalysis collected evidence of variation within sexuality and gender (Freud, for example, posited the concept of bisexuality). They also argued that adult gendered behaviour and identities are not fixed at birth but formed in childhood; femininity and masculinity were 'psychological forms constructed by social processes' (Connell 1987: 28). However, wedded as they were to scientific explanations these scientists did not give full weight to social influence or consider how power and equality related to gender. In the mid twentieth century the concept of 'sex roles' became a popular explanation for gender difference (Connell 1987: 23-38). Talcott Parsons (1956) notably proposed that male instrumentality and female expressiveness were learned through socialisation and were functional consequences of society's need for stability and harmony.

Though insufficiently attuned to power relations, these demonstrate a move towards what is probably the most significant contribution to feminist and sociological gender theory: the idea that gender is socially constructed. This is now a standard assumption within sociological work on gender. Essentialism is rejected.[85] Gender is not 'natural' but interpreted and made within social contexts, framed by social structures and institutions, in social interaction. Following Simone de Beauvoir's (1953) statement 'one is not born a woman, one becomes one' early theoretical work distinguished between sex as biological and gender as the meanings culture gives to biological sex (Stoller 1968; Money & Ehrhardt 1972; Oakley 1972; Maccoby & Jacklin 1974; Ortner 1974). Gayle Rubin (1975: 159) described this 'sex/gender system' as 'the set of arrangements by which a society transforms

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[85] Although see Fuss 1989's argument that social constructionist feminists are more closely aligned with essentialism than they claim.

biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied.'

Since they are constructed socially, understandings and practices of gender vary contextually, anthropologists show (Reiter 1975; Collier & Yanagisako 1987; Sanday 1981). These variations generally involve unequal power relations (Scott 1986). Feminist theorists highlighted the frequent presence of 'patriarchy' (male dominance) and female subordination in many societies as part of their struggle to challenge women's subordination. Some anthropologists followed Lévi-Strauss in identifying 'binary oppositions' (female/male, nature/culture, black/white etc.) wherein attributes associated with maleness, culture, whiteness etc. are taken as the universal human standard and considered superior; femaleness is denigrated and marginalised (Ortner 1974; Ortner & Whitehead 1981).

Theorists attribute differing importance to social structure or human agency in the construction of gender. Connell (2002: 10), for example, understands gender as:

> *the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices (governed by this structure) that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes*. To put it informally, gender concerns the way human society deals with human bodies, and the many consequences of that 'dealing' in our personal lives and our collective fate. (his emphasis)

Interactionists prefer to stress the ways gender is formed as meanings circulate in social interactions (West & Zimmerman 1987; Baron & Kotthoff 2001). Gender theory generally seeks to demonstrate the interplay of structure and agency in the formation of identity and social behaviour, and to see gender as diversified by factors including ethnicity, class and sexuality.

Another (related) debate within social constructionist theory is between materialism and postmodernism. Materialists work from the premises that 'matter has causal primacy over "spirit" or the "ideal", and that these are determined by the material world rather than vice versa' (Brooker 2002: 156). Incorporating variations, some identified as Marxist, materialism considers the material world prior and primary. Economic and material factors produce beliefs, ideologies and ideas and direct the world's course. Materialism interprets texts according to the material context in which they were written and are understood, and later cultural and linguistic materialists came to argue that culture and language are

themselves material (Coward & Ellis 1977; Williams 1977; Newton & Rosenfelt 1985). Materialism has significantly influenced feminist theory. Those operating under the (major) feminist 'umbrella' of socialist or Marxist feminism argued that social and economic processes of the material world were primarily responsible for gendered beliefs and practices and women's oppression. Materialist feminists considered industrial capitalism's sexual division of labour a major factor in the increasing dichotomisation of men and women, masculinity and femininity. The interaction between capitalism and patriarchy was responsible for the material and ideological oppression of women, according to feminists taking a materialist approach (Mitchell 1966, 1971; Rowbotham 1973, 1974; Delphy 1977; Barrett 1980; Hartsock 1985; Hennessy 1993; Leonard & Adkins 1996; Hennessy & Ingraham 1997).

Postmodern and poststructuralist theorists reject the sex/gender framework as one of the binary oppositions of western metaphysics (Poxon 2001: 149). Postmodernist or poststructuralist gender and feminist theories have fundamentally reconceptualised the human subject, epistemology and politics (Weedon 1987; Zalewski 2000).[86] They extend the notion that gender is constructed to claim that ('biological') sex is also a construction, and a discursive one at that. It is not materiality that produces beliefs about gender, postmodernist theorists argue. Rather, ideas are primary in influencing the way people understand and experience embodiment (Hollway 1984; Nicholson 1989; de Lauretis 1988; Fraser & Nicholson 1989; Flax 1990, 1993a, 1993b).

Following Foucault (1972, 1977, 1979; Fairclough 1992: 37-61), postmodern feminists view claims to truth and knowledge as ways power is exercised: women are subjugated through powerful discourses that claim to describe, but in the process prescribe, their identity and behaviour. These descriptions create positions for women that are unequal and may further marginalise certain groups of women. For postmodernists 'woman' cannot be defined or said to exist other than strategically; femaleness and femininity are performed. In Judith Butler's (1990: 25) words, 'There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results.' Postmodern feminists show that modernist feminism's claim to liberate women by casting them as a specific category failed, especially because it ignored diversity

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[86] This is not to say that second-wave feminism was uniformly modernist. See Fraser & Nicholson 1989 and Hekman 1990.

among women. They suggest instead that deconstructing essentialist notions of gender will introduce liberating possibilities.

Yet materialist and postmodern feminist understandings are not polar opposites. Both attempt explanations of the world that include discourse and practice. For materialist theorists, material relations influence the construction of discourse; indeed, they construct discourse. For postmodernists, discourse affects the way people position themselves as embodied subjects; it positions people as subjects. Much work has gone on within each to synthesise the others' concerns; materialist feminists' attention to discourse and the fragmentation of the subject demonstrates this (Hennessy 1993; Landry & MacLean 1993), as does poststructuralist feminists' conception that discourse (itself a product of material historical conditions) creates, or hails, embodied subjects (Hollway 1984; Mohanty 1991).

Contemporary understandings and practices of gender: postfeminism

Besides being concerned with gender's origin and operation, gender theorists seek to understand how gender is understood and lived in the *contemporary* context and how social change has influenced this. One recent theoretical framework for looking at this, which I shall adopt, is 'postfeminism'. The most precise and useful work on postfeminism has come from cultural and media studies[87] rather than sociology, where empirical and theoretical work on postfeminism is peculiarly lacking. Michèle Barrett's (2000) is one of the few (British) attempts to delineate different understandings. Barrett (2000: 46) argues that postfeminism has two major connotations:

> 1 A popular feeling that a drearily militant feminist politics has been succeeded by a new phenomenon – we can shorthand it as 'girl power' – which puts the femininity back into women's sense of identity and aspiration.
> 2 Academic developments that have transformed feminist theory through the incorporation of ideas from post-structuralist theory. These ideas cut away so much of the conceptual ground on which feminist theory previously rested, that – to some – they justify the use of the term 'post-feminist.'

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[87] For example, the international conference 'Interrogating Post-feminism: The Politics of Gender and Popular Culture' at the University of East Anglia, 2nd-3rd April 2004.

While I acknowledge these two below, I do not consider them the only – or even the two primary – connotations of postfeminism.[88] It is therefore necessary to explore further the range of understandings of postfeminism.

Concurrent with the ascendance of 'New Right' thinking as Margaret Thatcher's Conservative party came to power in 1979 was an increasing disunity within British feminism, a disunity symbolised by the closure of the national women's liberation conferences. From the early 1980s 'postfeminism' entered into academic and journalistic discussion. Its prefix 'post' denotes its use for what has come after the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s and 1970s known as second-wave feminism.[89] That it refers to something *after* (generally second-wave) feminism is uncontested. As Charlotte Brunsdon (1997: 101) explains, the term postfeminism is useful 'if used in an historically specific sense to mark changes in popularly available understandings of femininity and a woman's place that are generally recognized as occurring in the 1980s.' Beyond this, attempts to delineate postfeminism acknowledge the near impossibility of the task (Gamble 1999; Lotz 2001). Postfeminism is a disputed term used to refer to different and sometimes contradictory facets of contemporary gender relations – or 'many aspects of contemporary *women's* lives' (Projansky 2001: 86, my emphasis). While the 'feminism' within 'postfeminism' may appear to shift focus from gender relations to the state of contemporary feminism, I shall argue that postfeminism *is* a legitimate and effective term for conceptualising contemporary gender relations.

'Postfeminism' has been used in more or less six different ways. Postfeminism is employed to signify: the notions that 1) feminism is now dead, 2) feminism is now unnecessary and 3) second-wave feminism is irrelevant to young women's aspirations; 4) postmodern feminism, 5) a backlash against second-wave feminism and 6) a tension between support for feminisms and for pre-, non- or anti-feminist 'separate spheres' traditionalism. Some definitions are located primarily in academia, while others are more common in popular parlance. The final definition, of postfeminism as tension, I explain and expand on

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[88] In the American popular cultural context, Sarah Projansky (2001: 66-89) details approaching twenty versions, grouping them into five categories: linear postfeminism, backlash postfeminism, equality and choice postfeminism, (hetero)sex-positive postfeminism and men's postfeminism.

[89] However, the term 'postfeminism' was also used in Britain from 1919, during and after first-wave feminism (Boles & Hoeveler 1996: 235).

for use throughout this thesis; for this reason I will delay introducing it until the second half of this chapter.

1) Postfeminism as the view that feminism is now dead

Within this notion feminism signifies more than philosophical commitments and practical attempts to raise women's status. Rather, feminism is conceptualised as a social movement, the second-wave women's liberation movement. This view considers that a breakdown in feminist unity at the end of the 1970s, epitomised by the 1978 closure of the national women's liberation conferences with their seven agreed demands (Coote & Campbell 1982: 24-26), marked feminism's demise. Gone are the local 'consciousness-raising' groups and national campaigns. No longer united around collective identity (Melucci 1989) feminism failed to sustain its status as a movement.

If feminism is just another term for the women's liberation movement, feminism has, in this view, died. To be postfeminist is to inhabit a society no longer influenced by a coherent feminist movement. In 1998, America's *Time* magazine asked 'Is Feminism Dead?', concluding that the activist feminists of the women's liberation movement had been replaced by young 'pseudo feminists' unconcerned with key issues like equal pay and childcare (Bellafante 1998). A British parallel is visible in the 2003 Cambridge Union debate 'This houses believes that feminism is dead' (Livesey et al. 2003). The 2003 research commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission (2003; Howard & Tibballs 2003) into British people's experiences of gender (in)equality produced responses describing feminism as past or 'outmoded'. Media reports of the study and feminism in general demonstrate an over-emphasis on the death of feminism that belies evidence to the contrary. Intriguingly, some second-wave feminists also suggest that feminism is past in that since (they believe) young women have not taken it up, it remains the possession of their own, middle-aged, generation (Looser & Kaplan 1997, Aune & Livesey 2003 and Livesey et al. 2003 discuss this).

2) Postfeminism as the view that feminism is now unnecessary

This popular idea looks optimistically at feminist achievements and claims sufficient advances in women's favour have been made to render feminism unnecessary or redundant. As Coppock et al. (1995: 4) put it, 'If the claim to a "post-feminist" society is underpinned by any one principle it is that women have "made it", or they have the opportunity to "make it"'. Women's increased visibility in the public sphere has, some argue, created an egalitarian society in which 'all women have to do is grasp the nettle if they are genuine in their desire to achieve equal status with men' (Sperling 2000: 13). Aided by legislation like the 1970 Equal Pay Act and the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act, feminism has become institutionalised, and this is sufficient to ensure, if women desire and work hard, their equal status and opportunities. In this popular understanding:

> postfeminism is the depiction of the present as the end point of a linear feminism that promotes 'equal rights,' 'choice,' and individualism for white, middle-class, heterosexual women. Having achieved (or even almost achieved) this version of equality, in which women can choose 'to have it (work, family, [hetero]sexual expression) all' or choose not to have it all, the contemporary era follows a feminist era and inherits the benefits, failures, and pitfalls of that feminism, whether or not particular writers interpret the postfeminist era as having profited or suffered from the feminism that preceded it. (Projansky 2001: 87)

According to Naomi Wolf (1991: 281), postfeminism, 'the pious hope that battles have all been won', is a 'pernicious fib that is crippling young women'. (However, Wolf can be labelled a postfeminist; see below). Carol Rumens entitles her (1985) women's poetry collection *Making for the Open: The Chatto Book of Post-Feminist Poetry 1964-1984*, arguing that while much women's poetry has been explicitly feminist, sufficient moves towards equality have been achieved to enable women poets to turn to other non-feminist concerns.

3) Postfeminism as the view that second-wave feminism is irrelevant to young women's aspirations

From the early 1990s, beginning in America, a new generation, some claiming a feminist identity, began criticising the second-wave generation. Their 'postfeminism', Sarah Gamble suggests (1999: 43-53), centres on the issues of victimisation, autonomy and

responsibility. Gamble cites writers taking this view. Like Camille Paglia (1992: 51) who places the responsibility for avoiding sexual assault in women's hands, Katie Roiphe (1993) argues that feminist moves against sexual harassment on college campuses were self-defeating because they were based on victim feminism. She accuses feminists of 'political correctness,' dogmatism and inflexibility. Rene Denfeld's (1995) charge is that second-wave feminism disadvantaged women by depicting them as victims; this, she says, is a throwback to the Victorian designation of women as morally pure but politically weak. Naomi Wolf (1993), who Gamble (1999: 48) calls 'one of the most identifiable faces of postfeminism', argues that feminism has been rejected because it has been portrayed as 'anti' everything. Instead, it should start affirming women's choices. Wolf recommends women embrace 'power feminism' and seek equality through economic independence. British journalist Natasha Walter, advocate of 'the new feminism', belongs ideologically with these 'postfeminist' writers. She rejects the second-wave tenet 'the personal is political', charging those feminists with possessing 'a rigid ideology that alienates and divides women who are working for the same end: increased power and equality for women' (Walter 1998: 4-5).

This 'postfeminism' 'bears a striking resemblance to a liberal feminist agenda of the 1970s' (Richardson 2000: 60). Its proponents reject the radical feminist critique of heterosexuality and male violence and advocate instead women's enjoyment of sexual relationships with men. Similarly, they replace the socialist or Marxist feminist criticism of capitalism with the view that women need equality within the existing economic system. Mary Douglas Vavrus (2002: 184) criticises these 'postfeminist' trends as consumerist and elitist: 'Postfeminism represents a direction for feminism that emphasizes the positionality and class interests of a relatively small group of women' (white, heterosexual and of high socio-economic status).

This notion of postfeminism signifying young women's rejection of much second-wave feminism is further complicated by the development, more recognised in the US, of third-wave feminism. Influenced particularly by critiques by black, lesbian and working-class women, third-wave feminism refers to recent configurations of feminism emphasising diversity and difference (key texts include Findlen 1995; R. Walker 1995; Heywood & Drake 1997; Baumgardner & Richards 2000; Hernandez & Rehman 2002). The term 'third-wave' is generational and third-wave feminists, who emerged from the 1990s in the US and the late 1990s in the UK, are young women committed to improving the lives of their generation of

women (Rasmusson 2003; Gillis et al. 2004; Henry 2004). British manifestations include Walter's (1999) edited collection, the Riot Grrrl networks, the Ladyfest arts festivals and the website The F-Word.[90] While third-wave feminism may partly be equated with Denfeld, Roiphe, Walter and Wolf's 'postfeminism' – Ann Braithwaite (2002) highlights second-wave academics' tendency to conflate them[91] – young, self-identified third-wave feminists often reject this equation (Heywood & Drake 1997; Baumgardner & Richards 2000). The relationship between third-wave feminism and postfeminism is uneasy and 'ever-changing' (Braithwaite 2002), yet there is in my view a different emphasis: Denfeld et al. focus on criticising the second wave, while third-wave feminists retain committed to a politicised feminism, albeit addressing a new generation and more diverse cultural contexts.

4) Postfeminism as postmodern feminism

As touched on earlier, postmodern feminism refers to the diversification of feminism in a context influenced by postmodernism and poststructuralism. Postfeminism and postmodern feminism have regularly been conflated. Sophia Phoca and Rebecca Wright (1999), for example, associate postfeminism with the radical essentialism of a group of French feminist scholars influenced by psychoanalysis, postmodernism and poststructuralism. Phoca and Wright name as prominent 'postfeminists' Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous.

In her book *Postfeminisms* Ann Brooks (1997: 4) suggests that postfeminism is a 'conceptual shift within feminism from debates around equality to a focus on debates around difference'. Challenging modernist epistemology, it critically engages with postmodernism, poststructuralism and post-colonialism, producing feminism that addresses marginality and cultural diversity. For Brooks postfeminism is postmodern feminism. Angela McRobbie (1994: 67-71) also conflates postfeminism and postmodernism, yet unlike Brooks appears not to acknowledge competing definitions of postfeminism.[92] Toril Moi (1990: 368) does likewise; she 'use[s] the term "postfeminism" to cover the different configurations of feminism and postmodernism around today'. Poststructuralist theorist Judith Butler (1990: 5)

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[90] www.thefword.org.uk
[91] Gamble 1999 exemplifies this conflation.
[92] McRobbie's recent work on postfeminism is more nuanced, as I will discuss.

has called 'postfeminist' the then-contemporary period within which feminist reflection could take place 'on the injunction to construct a subject of feminism'.

5) Postfeminism as a backlash against second-wave feminism

The view that postfeminism denotes a New Right backlash associated with the administrations of Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in America has received support in popular cultural and academic discussions. (This chapter will describe this backlash in more detail later.) American journalist Susan Faludi (1992) popularised the concept of backlash in her bestseller of that name. Faludi (1992: 13) cites the 1970s as the beginning of the North American backlash, arguing that the origins of this 'powerful counterassault on women's rights' were with the evangelical right, whose 'fundamentalist ideology' had moved from the fringes to the government by the early 1980s. Several years later, buoyed by growing resistance to feminism, it passed into mainstream culture. Faludi sees postfeminism as an anti-feminist backlash disguised as an intelligent critique of feminism. The backlash is 'insidious', she writes; 'it stands the truth boldly on its head and proclaims that the very steps that have elevated women's position have actually led to their downfall' (Faludi 1992: 12).

Imelda Whelehan (1995: 239-240) argues that British second-wave feminists never fully achieved their goals. By the late 1970s they faced a 'conservative reaction' against the 'so-called "permissive society"' and a perceived 'tidal wave of feminism.' This 'postfeminist' backlash was 'strengthened in the wake of economic recession.' While feminists might have welcomed the election of the first female Prime Minister, they had 'to face…sustained attacks on [women's] newly won economic and domestic freedoms', having been 'largely unsuccessful in effecting legislative changes.' The authors of this backlash, the New Right, seek a return to gender essentialism and 'the family', Whelehan argues, and they and the media deploy images of independent, successful women to cast feminism as redundant.[93]

Oakley and Mitchell (1997: 4) note that the backlash has been 'renamed "post-feminism"'; they also recognise my first two definitions. Coppock et al. (1995: 3) perceive an

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[93] Whelehan's view of postfeminism has broadened. Her 2000 discussion encompasses more of the other notions I discuss. Notably, she sees postfeminism partly as a 'new' feminism for young women that incorporates anti-feminist attitudes.

intimate relationship between a backlash and postfeminism, concluding that postfeminism is 'a concept…derived somewhere within the backlash':

> It was no coincidence that 'post-feminism' emerged as initiatives in government and industry were announced promoting the 1990s as the decade of gender equality…Now, it was argued, all had been achieved, in fact over-achieved, to the point that many men were left confused, their identities shattered, and many women struggled with over-expectancy. The irony is, however, that the proclamation of 'post-feminism' has occurred at precisely the same moment as acclaimed feminist studies demonstrate that not only have women's real advancements been limited, but also that there has been a backlash against feminism of international significance.

And for Tania Modleski (1991: 3), 'postfeminist texts' 'in proclaiming or assuming the advent of postfeminism, are actually engaging in negating the critiques and undermining the goals of feminism – in effect, delivering us back into a prefeminist world'.

After I have introduced my position within theories of gender development, I will evaluate these definitions. Drawing on emerging discussions conceptualising postfeminism as tension I will develop the understanding of postfeminism I use throughout this thesis.

The theoretical stance of this research

Between materialism and postmodernism, discourse and practice

Because gender is socially constructed – structurally, institutionally, in social interaction, discursively, in performance – ethnographic research on gender is vital. In setting out to understand evangelicals' understandings and practices of gender I wanted to see, with reference to the gendered patterns and discourses of contemporary Britain, what evangelicals think masculinity and femininity constitute, how they demonstrate (or fail to demonstrate) this through their lived experiences and what forms their gender practices take.

The last chapter located my epistemological stance between feminist standpoint theory and feminist postmodernism. This is my position regarding the construction and operation of gender. I largely reject essentialism and am a social constructionist. But social constructionism is broad. I take a position between a materialist view that gender and

gendered subjects are produced primarily through material circumstances and a postmodernist emphasis on the primacy of discourse in creating gendered subjects.

Some, often materialists and second-wave feminists, argue that distinguishing between *ideas about* and *practices of* gender is crucial. Pro-feminist masculinity theorist Kenneth Clatterbaugh (1998) is critical of the postmodernist turn among gender theorists more concerned with ideas and images of masculinity than with how actual men behave. In order not to ignore power inequalities between women and men he considers that despite the complex relationship between bodies and discourses it is important to discuss and differentiate between both discourses and practices of gender. I am dissatisfied with this plea for dichotomisation, and take a stance that recognises the breadth and interrelationship of discourse and practice.

It is necessary to define what I mean by 'discourses' or 'ideologies' of gender (I concentrate particularly on those of separate spheres, feminism and an anti-feminist backlash) and clarify my understanding of their relationship to social 'practices'. I use the terms 'discourses', 'notions', 'beliefs' and 'ideologies' to signify the former, and 'practices', 'manifestations' and 'patterns' the latter. 'Discourse' is a broad concept deployed in specific ways in different disciplines. I use it partly in the Foucauldian sense to describe systems of language and forms of belief that circulate in social interaction to produce subjectivity as people adopt or resist them (Brook 1999: 159). I employ it loosely, almost interchangeably with 'ideology', to refer to 'any organized body or corpus of statements and utterances governed by rules and conventions of which the user is largely unconscious' (Macey 2000: 100), to 'a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events' (Burr 1995: 48).

I use 'ideology' not for its negative connotations of false consciousness or totalitarianism, but more generally to signify a worldview or set of beliefs or attitudes (Abercrombie et al. 1994: 206-208; Elliott 1996). Ideology is not necessarily the possession of an elite but is produced and reproduced socially at popular and official levels (Morgan 1991). Like discourse, it often operates through a particular deployment of time, 'whether it be in looking back to some golden age, forward to a glorious future or through the elimination of a sense of change altogether in favour of unchanging verities' (Morgan 1991: 123). Separate spheres ideology/discourse was produced during modernity, a time characterised by optimism about future progress (Peyrefitte 1998 quoted in Bauman 2001:

28) and is used today by some evangelicals or New Right supporters to signify a past ideal to which people should orient their behaviour. Developing Althusser's notion of ideology as the 'imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence', Mary Poovey (1988: 3) argues that ideologies are not simply ideas; rather, 'they are given concrete form in the practices and social institutions that govern people's social relations and that, in so doing, constitute both the experience of social relations and the nature of subjectivity.' This notion renders it possible to regard 'ideology' as uniting belief and practice.

Lilie Chouliaraki and Norman Fairclough (1999: 21) equally claim that 'practices', which they define as 'habitualised ways, tied to particular times and places, in which people apply resources (material or symbolic) to act together in the world', encompass ideology and practice, demonstrating their indivisibility. Discourse, or constructions and accounts of practices, can be part of practices. Therefore, 'there is no simple opposition between theory and practice but rather a close and practical relation between them, because people's reflexive representations of what they do are in a sense already theories…of their practices, which are a normal part of their practices' (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999: 26).

There is no neat resolution to the messy relationship between discourses/ideologies and practices for the social scientist analysing gender in social settings. Yet this does not signify failure. Acknowledging this messiness is important; it is part of what constitutes the doing or believing of gender in contemporary Britain. The relationship between discourse and social practice is ambiguous and difficult. Ideology and practice sometimes cohere and sometimes diverge. This occurs at a local level, where individuals' reports of their attitudes do not match their lived experience: divorced people may think divorce is wrong; working mothers may favour stay-at-home motherhood (Delamont 2001: 98). Moreover, both similarity and differences between ideology and practice exist in the historical patterns (separate spheres, feminism, backlash) I consider notable parts of postfeminism. Ideology is constructed through practice; ideology is in process and is changeable. Words are 'performative', 'illocutionary acts', as philosopher J. L. Austin (1962: 6; see also Furberg 1971) pointed out: 'When I say, before the registrar or altar, &c., "I do", I am not reporting on a marriage: I am indulging in it.' Discourse shapes and is shaped by social structure and practice (Fairclough 1992).

Because (though notwithstanding their interrelationship) discourse is easier to uncover than practice, especially when the historical past is being investigated, I attend

throughout this study a little more to what constitutes separate spheres, feminist, backlash or postfeminist discourse than practice. I recognise the danger this holds of ignoring embodied subjects, and so although I believe discourses are substantially responsible for creating subjectivity, I seek to present women and men, not just discourses of masculinity and femininity. Because of the overlap between discourse/ideology and practice, the mention of either does not preclude the inclusion of the other; I refuse, and am unable, to drive a wedge between them.

Postfeminism: evaluating existing definitions

Careful attention should be given to the context evangelical gender construction occurs in. While much research on evangelicalism and gender reads the construction of gender through a framework concerned with social theories of *religious* change, this thesis takes an unusual step in the British context. Situated within women's or gender studies and feminist sociology, it locates evangelical makings of gender in relation to social theories concerning gender in contemporary Britain.

I outlined earlier five dominant definitions of postfeminism. While they are all useful, these are inadequate and reductive alone, making it necessary to formulate a sixth approach to use in this thesis. Some of the existing definitions condense 'postfeminism', rendering it simply another name for something else (postmodern feminism, for example). Some ignore the complexity of contemporary gender practices and beliefs. Some take a linear view of history as a process of increasing equality (the view that postfeminism signifies a situation of equality does this) or of increasing or sustained inequality (as those perceiving postfeminism as backlash do). Those claiming that western societies are facing a sustained attack on or rejection of feminism should recognise the continuing support for feminism or feminist views. They should also, as Sylvia Walby (1993, 1997) argues, recognise that backlashes against feminism are not simply repetitions of earlier traditionalisms. Rather, enacted in a new context, their traditionalism takes different forms. The post-second-wave backlash demonstrates not the movement of women back to 'private patriarchy' in the home, but – as women entered the workforce in large numbers – a shift to 'public patriarchy'. The backlash definition also fails to see feminism's presence within conservative ideology. Thatcherism was not simply a traditionalist backlash – Thatcher was a '"post-feminist" careerist'

(Franklin et al. 1991: 43) who believed feminism had become unnecessary because the gender equality battle had been won. And as research continues to document present-day gendered inequalities (in employment, politics, religion, domestic labour, cultural representations, sexuality, crime, violence against women etc.) the theory that women have achieved equality or liberation is decidedly premature. Some of the mainly academic definitions – particularly the conflation of postmodern feminism and postfeminism – fail to recognise the existence of popular cultural definitions or grassroots feminist activism. Likewise, the more media-generated understandings, such as the view that feminism is dead, demonstrate no awareness of the influence of feminism (modernist and postmodernist) in academia.

Walby (1993: 85) counsels academic feminists to 'beware of underestimating both our achievements and the opposition,' a warning relevant in this postfeminist context. What Walby does not note, though, is that feminism and opposition often coexist. The most pertinent failure of the five understandings of postfeminism is not discerning that the context the term 'postfeminist' is deployed to describe is one of tension or paradox – support for feminisms (new or old) exists alongside anti-feminist and conservative gender beliefs; support for traditionalism (new or old) exists alongside feminist beliefs.

An alternative definition: postfeminism as an amalgam of gender traditionalism and feminism occurring within a late-modern context

Along with growing numbers of gender theorists, I suggest bringing this complex amalgam of conservatism and feminism into prime focus and defining it as postfeminism. I take postfeminism to refer to attitudes and practices of gender that amalgamate feminist and traditionalist ideologies within a postindustrial context. It is a sometimes-contradictory adherence to both gender traditionalism (manifested in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century notion of separate spheres and the post-1970s backlash against feminism) and feminist discourses, enacted within a late-modern context. This understanding encompasses the definitions of postfeminism as postmodern feminism and anti-feminist backlash. It also takes account of understandings of feminism as dead, unnecessary and irrelevant to young women's aspirations.

Some explanations of postfeminism have begun depicting it as a position of tension between feminism and pre-feminist traditionalism. Esther Sonnet (1999: 170) argues:

> The simplest definition suggests that feminism has achieved its major goals and become irrelevant to the lives of young women today. The 'post' therefore signifies a 'going beyond' or moving on from feminism, with the implicit assumption that its critiques and demands have been accommodated and absorbed far enough to permit 'return' to pre-feminist pleasures now transformed in meaning by a feminist consciousness.

Two discussions of postfeminism in the US television series *Ally McBeal* consider the 'confusion and contradiction', the 'tension', in popular cultural portrayals of postfeminist femininity (Lotz 2001: 105; Moseley & Read 2002). Lotz lists four 'postfeminist attributes' within *Ally McBeal*. Television shows like *Ally McBeal* can be described as postfeminist when their narratives 1) explore the diverse relations to power women inhabit; 2) depict varied feminist solutions and loose organizations of activism; 3) deconstruct binary categories of gender and sexuality, instead viewing them as flexible and indistinct; and 4) raise and examine the contemporary struggles faced by women and feminists (Lotz 2001: 115-116). In Rachel Moseley and Jacinda Read's reading, three key tensions exemplifying postfeminism are present within *Ally McBeal*. First, there is a 'holding on to a feminist position in a world where both feminism's battle is understood to be won, but in which conventionally feminine pleasures and attributes are valued by its female characters and some members of its audience.' Second, there is 'the complex space between reality and fantasy, and closely related to this, the profoundly postfeminist reconfiguration of the distinction between public and private.' The third tension is 'the blurring of the hierarchical and gendered division between private and public, personal and professional' (Moseley & Read 2002: 241-245). The authors argue that *Ally McBeal*'s exploration of the postfeminist tensions faced by a certain category of women today (single, thirty-something, economically successful) explains its success.

Judith Stacey's is the definition of postfeminism I draw most inspiration from. Stacey first encountered what she called postfeminism during ethnographic fieldwork at an evangelical Christian mission in Silicon Valley, California. She was intrigued to meet women who had been involved with the 1960s and 1970s counter-cultural and women's movements and had subsequently converted to evangelical Christianity. While such conversions might

engender wholesale rejection of feminist ideals, Stacey encountered an intriguing mix of conservative and feminist attitudes. These women felt their feminist commitments had failed them in their desire for happy, communicative marriages to sensitive men. Evangelicalism, however, succeeded in transforming their men's priorities, stressing male spiritual leadership alongside men's responsibility to nurture and support their wives emotionally. While the women felt feminism had not solved their problems, they nevertheless endorsed, and had gained from, many of its emphases (Stacey 1987, 1990, 1998; Rosenfelt & Stacey 1987; Stacey & Gerard 1990). Stacey named this attitude postfeminist.

Stacey (1987: 8) sees postfeminism as 'the simultaneous incorporation, revision, and depoliticisation of many of the central goals of second wave feminism'. Rayna Rapp (1988: 32) likewise argues that postfeminism constitutes 'the reduction of feminist social goals to individual "life-style"', while Mascia-Lees and Sharpe (2000: 203) counter that 'feminist ideas are not always depoliticized within postfeminism. They can instead be differently politicized.' Postfeminism is 'a consciousness that accepts many feminist convictions, while rejecting both the feminist label and feminist political engagement (Stacey & Gerard 1990: 99). It is distinct from feminism and antifeminism, with which it coexists (Stacey 1998: 19); I suggest that it amalgamates both. It represents, as Stacey (1998: 19) puts it, 'the gender consciousness and strategies of vast numbers of women and men – those legions of subscribers to the doctrine, "I'm not a women's libber, but…"'

Taking my position between materialism and postmodernism, I discuss in this and the chapters that follow features of this configuration of discourse and practice concerning gender I call 'postfeminist'. Postfeminism is more easily approached as 'a cultural discourse' (Projansky 2001: 88) than a set of material practices, though the two are not easily separable. I conceptualise postfeminism as a sometimes-contradictory adherence to both gender traditionalism and feminism occurring in late modernity. This paradigm provides the theoretical framework for this thesis. In order to demonstrate in subsequent chapters what postfeminist congregational life, marriage, masculinity and women's singleness constitute, I begin each chapter outlining first discourses (and where possible practices) of separate spheres, then feminism, then the anti-feminist backlash. I then summarise how these work together to produce, in a late-modern context, postfeminist manifestations of the theme under investigation. Applying this framework to NFI, I then consider how far NFI's discourses and practices of the theme under investigation reflect these postfeminist patterns.

For example, in the chapter on marriage I identify the male-headed, female-housewife nuclear family as the prime manifestation of separate spheres. I then show how feminism challenged this, problematising male-headed marriage as an arena of women's oppression and arguing for egalitarian relationships. I then turn to the backlash against feminism and how New Right Conservatism reasserted marriage and the nuclear family. Finally, I discuss the late-modern decline in marriage that has occurred alongside liberalised divorce laws and an increase in cohabitation. I note and call postfeminist the contemporary tension between enduring support for the nuclear family and increasing plurality of non-marital and ideologically egalitarian intimate relationships. I then analyse NFI's literature about marriage, interviews with members of the local congregation I studied (Westside) and fieldnotes from participant observation at Westside. I reveal that NFI support, in postfeminist fashion, both the nuclear family and egalitarian alternatives. In the case of marriage I observe strong ideological support for the nuclear family coupled at Westside with egalitarian marriage practices. At this juncture it is helpful to outline what I regard as the four key components in postfeminism: separate spheres, feminism, backlash and postfeminism's contemporary, late-modern, context.

Separate spheres

I use the terms 'separate spheres', 'traditional', 'nineteenth-century', 'Victorian', 'conservative' and 'differentiated' to describe the increasing separation of men and women that occurred from the late eighteenth century and continued in the nineteenth. Recognising that these terms are not synonyms, I try to avoid inaccurate usage. I use 'traditional' to signify not pre-modern but, as Giddens (1996: 14-16) puts it, 'an orientation to the past, such that the past has a heavy influence, or, more accurately put, is made to have a heavy influence, over the present.' Separate spheres may be called a tradition because despite its relative youth sociologists commonly consider it key to understanding social changes in gender relations in the West. Beck et al. (1994: vi-vii) regard it as legitimate to call separate spheres 'tradition' when they refer to 'the "hidden substratum" of modernity, involving traditions affecting gender, the family…'; I will discuss their thesis that 'detraditionalization' is eroding 'traditional' separate spheres gender patterns of modernity later. 'Conservative' is a problematic term because of its political connotations; while I believe right-wing politics

has a greater affection for separate spheres gender roles and the nuclear family than left-wing politics, with which feminism often has stronger ties,[94] my usage is only sometimes political. It more often signifies desire to preserve and reluctance to make changes. My designation of separate spheres patterns as traditional and conservative is retrospective, since separate spheres was a late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century innovation. I retain 'conservative' and 'traditional' despite these complications because they are commonly used to refer to separate spheres.

Most often associated with the work of Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall (1987, 2002), the 'separate spheres' thesis has become a, perhaps *the*, paradigm sociologists use to discuss social changes in gender in the West, especially in Britain. Michael Kimmel (1987: 280) calls the nineteenth century 'the crucible in which our contemporary understandings of masculinity and femininity were forged.' Likewise, for Connell (1995: 68), our concept of masculinity (and, we could add, femininity) 'seems to be a fairly recent historical product, a few hundred years old at most'. Connell dates it from the development of individualistic notions of personhood that developed as capitalism progressed, combined with a new differentiation between male and female bodies buttressed by the nineteenth-century 'bourgeois ideology of "separate spheres"'. Although theorists from Marx and Engels forward may disagree about aspects of industrialisation's making of the modern family, considerable unity remains about the importance of this process. In her summary of feminist sociological theorisation of the western gendered division of labour, Nickie Charles (2002: 3-8) lists two suggested causes of the labour division: social structures (capitalism, patriarchy or a combination of the two) and gender ideology. Though these deserve less stark separation, Charles is right to note first that what I call separate spheres and its ideological and practical manifestations have been of primary importance in social theorisation of gender, and second, that gender underwent significant changes that may be called the emergence of separate spheres.

As the following account shows, many historians endorse the separate spheres paradigm. However, it has been challenged. Some date the nuclear family and the transition to industrial capitalism to a much earlier period or argue that the nuclear family dominated in pre-industrial England (Laslett 1972; Stone 1979; Macfarlane 1986). An alternative argument

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[94] However, Maguire (1998) argues that both the Labour and Conservative parties have largely held gender-differentiated attitudes.

challenges the gender differentiation and gender hierarchy believed integral to a capitalist private/public split. Robert Shoemaker (1998) argues both that separate spheres partly existed before industrialisation and that in the nineteenth century there was more overlap between women and men's activities than is implied by the phrase 'separate spheres'. That the separate spheres thesis sidelines the role of class in obstructing separate spheres' formation is a common criticism. Others consider it a simplistic 'grand narrative' (Thomas 1988; Vickery 1993; Rendall 1999 reviews these criticisms). Critics also reveal the complex interconnections between work and home (Rendall 1990; Davidoff et al. 1999; cf. Oakley 1974: 25). Women's activity in the private sphere may equally be labelled work, and women were also involved in tasks of production (Davidoff & Hall 1987: 33). Some argue that industrialisation did not entirely destroy the tendency to regard the whole household as a unit of economic production (Jenkins 1999: 114, 138-139); others that the separate spheres thesis overlooks Victorian feminist challenges to it (Hall 2000: 15).

However, I maintain along with many historians (Outhwaite 1981; Poovey 1988; Shanley 1989; Seccombe 1992, 1993; Clark 1995) that there is sufficient evidence for the existence of this modern separate spheres discourse – and also, to some extent, practice – of marriage and family from the late eighteenth and through the nineteenth centuries. The account I find most plausible holds that as capitalism gradually replaced feudalism from the sixteenth century, as industrialisation and urbanisation precipitated the separation of private from public, home from work, notably during the industrial revolution from the mid eighteenth century, households became more self-contained. Paid, productive economic activity moved primarily to the public sphere, while the home became the site of reproduction and leisure. As home and work were separated, so were women and men. While men took control of the public sphere, where they worked and (if middle-class) directed affairs of state, women predominated in the private sphere, caring for children and managing domestic tasks (or delegating if they were middle-class) (Tilly & Scott 1987). Carole Pateman (1988) argues that the supposedly universal citizenship of modern civil society was gendered; not only was the social contract often unavailable to women, a 'sexual contract' prioritised the public sphere (of men) and ignored the private sphere (of women) with the effect that men received freedom and women subjection. An increasing class separation occurred between, in Marxist terms, the owners of the means of production and the wage labourers as a new middle class emerged owning property and liquid capital. The family

form that gained ideological dominance was the bourgeois family. It became more self-contained and child-centred as declining death rates, especially amongst the middle classes, enabled parents to build bonds of affection with children, of whom they had fewer as birth control improved (Stone 1979).

The separate spheres family remained unattainable for many working-class people. Low wages paid to working-class men made it unviable economically and working-class women and men worked as servants in middle-class families (Seccombe 1992, 1993; Clark 1995). In equating ideal gendered behaviour with middle-class values, separate spheres discourse was oppressive towards the working classes, who were expected by religious, medical, legal and literary ideologues to attempt to conform to middle-class ideals of full-time motherhood despite their lack of economic resources.

Important in shoring up separate spheres ideology and practices was the view of men and women as natural opposites that Laqueur (1990) dates from the late eighteenth century (see earlier discussion). The reproductive systems of male and female bodies were regarded as central to this difference, with the result not only that women's childbearing capacity was stressed, but that motherhood became the central marker of womanhood and functioned to erase differences between women (Poovey 1988: 6-8). Victorian scientists, especially evolutionary theorists, supported separate spheres ideology by claiming the naturalness of the sexual division of labour (Russett 1989).

Davidoff and Hall (1987) outline a close connection between evangelicalism and the rise of these bourgeois values of gender difference. Although Kathleen Davies (1981) points to an earlier, Puritan differentiation of gender roles, Davidoff and Hall's argument remains well documented and persuasive. Evangelicals, they propose, were influential in the making of separate spheres and united, despite denominational differences, by a 'core of beliefs in the central importance of the family' and distinct male and female spheres (1987: 74). Evangelicals 'played a vital part in establishing the cultural practices and institutions which were to become characteristic of the middle classes' (1987: 76). Evangelical clergymen and writers promoted a theology of the family based around the emerging home/work divisions. Within evangelical theology the earthly family was thought to reflect the heavenly family and to be the 'natural' and basic unit of a stable society. The husband was seen as the household's head, (benignly) commanding while his wife willingly obeyed. And while the

husband worked outside the home to provide financially for his dependents, his wife's proper place was the domestic sphere (1987: 108-109).

Expanding literary and social culture aided evangelicals' promotion of separate spheres (Davidoff & Hall 1987: 78). Callum Brown's (2001) examination of journals and magazines, evangelical and non-, demonstrates evangelicalism's considerable influence within nineteenth-century popular culture, as evangelical discourses defined differentiated constructions of masculinity and femininity. Religion became integral to a sense of identity and community, as well as providing social and economic benefits (Davidoff & Hall 1987: 103). American historians of evangelicalism and gender (DeBerg 1990; Bendroth 1993) have given separate spheres considerable attention, regarding it as key to understanding evangelical constructions of gender.

To argue that separate spheres gender patterns have been influential is not to claim that a strict delineation was ever reached, certainly not practically and probably not ideologically. Walby's (1990: 179-184) point is helpful: though the theory that industrial capitalism 'caused' the gender differentiation of spheres may be exaggerated and patriarchy quite likely predated capitalism, it remains plausible to argue that the nineteenth century represented the height of 'private patriarchy', as middle-class women were more than ever confined to the home. Separate spheres ideology was stronger and more uniform than its attendant gender practices. Furthermore, separate spheres discourse contained contradictions, for example between women's social subordination and their presumed spiritual or moral superiority (Davidoff & Hall 1987: 149, 287, 322, 450-451; Poovey 1988).

Feminism

In my understanding of the feminism within postfeminism I consider particularly important feminism's challenges to separate spheres; I appreciate that this sidelines commonalities between feminist and separate spheres views.[95] Feminism is concerned with challenging women's subordination and promoting their equality and value (Humm 1995: 94-95; Delmar 1986; Mitchell & Oakley 1986). The spectrum of feminism recognises, and often seeks to marry, equality and difference. Women are equal to men and should be able to

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[95] For example gender traditionalists and some first- and second-wave feminists shared essentialist beliefs that women were inherently moral.

access the same rights and opportunities. Yet they are different in their social constructions and embodiment and these may, in women's interests, necessitate differential treatment. Some feminists are more concerned with promoting women's equality, others with their difference. In terms that came to currency during the second wave, equality feminists were known as liberal feminists (Humm 1995: 150-151); this formed one of three major second-wave approaches. Radical feminists were more concerned with difference, female solidarity and challenging gendered power differentials inherent within the social construction of gender (Humm 1995: 231-233). A third group introduced earlier, socialist and Marxist feminists, regarded capitalism as key to women's oppression. While liberal and socialist feminists appreciated men's involvement in feminism, radical feminists saw women-only organisations as politically and socially important. And while socialist/Marxist and radical feminists agreed about the need to reject and remove the public/private division and the capitalist economic system, liberal feminists favoured retaining, but reforming from inside, the existing system.

Feminism, like separate spheres, encompasses ideology and practice. Marilyn Frye (2000: 195) points out:

> Feminism may be understood as *theory* – systems of concepts, prepositions and analysis that describe and explain women's situations and experiences and support recommendations about how to improve them. Such theory is distinguished from non-feminist thinking about women or gender by its general respect for women's own perspectives and authority, and its persistent attention to the workings of power structures which privilege men. Feminism may also be understood as a kind of *social movement*, one that may generate and be aided by theory. Both are concerned with women's flourishing – women controlling adequate resources, of all sorts, to live well.

British feminism tends to be conceptualised as two social movements: the first, retrospectively called 'first-wave feminism', ran from the mid-nineteenth century and culminated in women winning the vote in 1918 at age 30 and 1928 at 21. Particular areas of first-wave feminist concern and campaigning included reform of marriage law, girls' and women's access to education and employment, the exploitation of women as prostitutes accompanying the sexual 'double standard' and suffrage. The second, the women's liberation movement or 'second-wave feminism', began in the late 1960s and was a coherent social movement until the end of the 1970s (McPherson 2000). This separation regrettably sidelines

feminist work during earlier periods,[96] from the suffragettes to the women's liberation movement (Spender 1983) and from the 1980s (Jolly 2003). Since the 1980s feminism has diversified, partly through adopting poststructuralist and postmodernist insights, and a third wave has begun.

I consider feminism an important aspect of gender discourse in Britain today and a major dimension of postfeminism. The demise of a second-wave feminist movement after 1978 did not herald the end of feminist influence or activism. From the 1990s feminists have worked at the intersection of the local and the global, within networks, creating new cultural forms, demonstrating activism in increasingly diverse ways (Humm 2000). Institutionalisation of feminism enabled feminist ideas and policies to filter down through government and higher education, while cultural diffusion saw the popular media capitalise on feminist concerns (Randall 2000). Melucci lists three consequences of the decline in visible feminist mobilisation: first, 'integration of feminist issues in the political market and in the market as a whole'; second, 'the formation of feminist institutions'; and third, the creation of a 'women's culture' within 'the fabric of everyday life' (1989: 95). As Sara Ahmed et al. (2000: 7-8) pertinently put it, 'While there are contemporary rhetorics hailing both a "backlash" culture and a "post-feminist" era, both notions testify to the impact of feminism.'

Feminism's heterogeneity makes it difficult to assert particular views as consistently 'feminist.' However, I consider it possible to claim a feminist consensus about women's needs a) for equal worth and status; b) for freedom from social, and economic circumstances, definitions and representations of them that are harsh, oppressive, unjust, subordinating or constricting and c) to be able to make free choices. Beyond this, the field is muddy and I include some of the differences when delineating feminist discourses about the key chapter themes this thesis covers.

Backlash against feminism

In discussing the anti-feminist backlash that is a primary connotation and component of 'postfeminism' I refer primarily to manifestations of opposition to feminism from the late

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[96] Key pre first-wave feminist figures include Aphra Behn, Mary Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill.

1970s that reached their heyday in the 1980s. There have been other anti-feminist backlashes – that from the 1920s to the 1960s was just as significant (Walby 1997).[97] My decision to focus on the recent backlash relates to space confinements, the greater textual resources available documenting the latter backlash and the fact that NFI are particularly located within the recent backlash. Whether Britain can still be said to be in a backlash is disputable. I suggest that while rejection of feminism still occurs, any contemporary backlash is less virulent than in the 1980s. I consider the term postfeminist more appropriate than backlash to describe the contemporary gender situation.

The backlash against feminism should be situated in social and political context. In 1979 Britain witnessed political change as government switched from Labour to the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher's leadership. Like Ronald Reagan's American administration, although less so, the Thatcher government became identified with an approach termed the 'New Right.'[98] Thatcher and Reagan's governments were committed both to liberal economic policies and conservative social and moral values. They supported the free market economy, with low direct taxation and limited government control of industry. The British New Right, partially aided by Conservative policies, opposed the 'liberal' social democratic policies of the previous Labour government which had supported family forms that differed from the New Right's nuclear ideal (David 1986). The New Right favoured minimal state intervention in family life, restricting public spending on welfare. They shifted responsibility to 'the family,' regarding it as a self-contained private unit requiring men's paid labour in the public sphere and women's unpaid labour in the private as stay-at-home childrearers (Abbott & Wallace 1992). As Miriam David (1986) argues, the success of markets in New Right ideology and policies depended upon women's willingness to engage in unpaid labour in the home.[99]

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[97] Some (Lasch 1997; Jamieson 1998; Charles 2002) regard the 1950s as the least feminist, most reactionary decade in recent British history, looking to it rather than nineteenth-century separate spheres discourse when locating conservative notions of gender.

[98] Martin Durham (1991: 139) argues that this identification was not entirely accurate: 'Thatcherism as a particular combination of neo-conservative and neo-liberal themes was only one (albeit, the major) element in the New Right. In addition, Thatcherism, whether in opposition or, even more, in power, operated under constraints and in unforeseen circumstances that make the consistent pursuit of an ideological project impossible'. See Levitas 1986.

[99] However, Thatcherite Conservative policies were not without contradiction. Abbott and Wallace (1992: 118-129) argue that Thatcher and Reagan's support for the libertarian tradition of individual responsibility and for the traditional patriarchal family structure presents a contradiction: in the libertarian tradition women are free to work, yet in the patriarchal family women's work outside the home is discouraged (see also Durham 1997). Moral campaigners may have recognised this, for they were often disappointed by the Conservative

Moral campaigning organisations endorsed New Right policies and separate spheres ideals of family and sexuality. Prominent among the (often-evangelical[100]) groups were Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers and Listeners Association (NVALA), the Community Standards Associations and the Festival of Light, which became a national organisation, changing its name to CARE (Christian Action Research and Education) in 1983. In 1988 CARE gave birth to Care for the Family, a group dedicated to promoting the nuclear family as a divinely ordained societal foundation (Thompson 1997); both exist today. The New Right were a stronger force in America than Britain,[101] but sufficient activity occurred to justify use of the term in Britain (Thompson 1992).

New Right policy and moral protest groups often opposed second-wave feminist goals (Luff 1996). Feminism has been positioned as a particular adversary in New Right discourse, as Ann Oakley and Juliet Mitchell (1997: 3-4) explain in theorising the backlash:

> To speak of a backlash against feminism implies a need to counteract the power feminism has exercised in changing women's lives. Women's lives have changed, but the backlash is as much against the threat of a change as it is a marker of transformations actually accomplished…Backlash is primarily 'a reactive position, defending something that is perceived either to have been lost, or to be under threat.' A backlash must formulate the case that it is opposing; with respect to feminism, it must characterize feminism in a particular way in order to convince us of its basically misguided, damaging nature. In this, feminism becomes a kind of generic ragbag, a collection of subjectively perceived disruptive social elements…Feminism – sometimes an aspect of it that really does or did exist, sometimes a fabrication dreamt up to explain our discontents – becomes the enemy…

The backlash 'works by reversal' (Walby 1997: 157). It blames feminism for causing the problems in women's lives that feminists are in fact trying to eradicate – such as women's double burden of housework and paid employment – and whose causes, feminists argue, originate particularly in the western context from industrialisation and separate spheres ideology. Additionally, as Oakley and Mitchell (1997: 4) highlight, this backlash was,

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government's failure to concede to their demands (Durham 1991). Similarly, Thatcherism cannot solely be labelled 'neo-traditional', given the attacks its policies levelled at some of 'those institutions centrally identified with tradition' (Morgan 1991: 125-126).

[100] As Klatch's (1987) study of the New Right points out, it should not be implied that evangelicals generally supported the New Right. As I will show, some evangelicals denounce New Right philosophies and favour a feminist position.

[101] For discussions of the American New Right see Eisenstein 1982, Conovor & Gray 1983, Klatch 1987, Bruce 1988, Diamond 1989, 1998. Studies of Britain include Durham 1991, Thompson 1992, Luff 1996.

importantly, not just a reaction against feminism but also 'nostalgia for a golden past of fixed (unequal) gender identities'; this 'golden past' is nineteenth-century separate spheres.

Notable was the backlash's support for men. Neil Lyndon (1992) and David Thomas (1993) published impassioned attacks on feminism for oppressing men. Lyndon claimed feminism had disadvantaged men, cataloguing discrimination against them with regard to parenthood, child custody and abortion. Thomas criticised radical feminists' analyses of male violence; men too, he argued, were victims of violence and suffered unfavourable treatment by healthcare professionals. In part driven by feminist criticism of men, in part by the loss of jobs in traditional male industries such as manufacturing, a 'crisis' in masculinity was declared (Horrocks 1994; Clare 2000; see Hearn's 1999 critique). Former feminists expressed remorse or criticised each other for 'going too far' in demonising or feminising men (Paglia 1990: 21-22; Weldon 2000). Backlash voices sought to reclaim a supposedly lost masculinity. Often this masculinity resembled that of separate spheres, with 'proper' masculinity associated with breadwinning, competitiveness and heterosexual insatiability. Popularised by Robert Bly's (1990) *Iron John* and at its most successful in the eighties and early nineties, the 'mythopoetic movement' taught men to embrace the 'wild man' archetype. In the UK, small manifestations of a men's movement existed within groups like the UK Men's Movement (founded in 1994 and now amalgamated with Dads After Divorce), Families Need Fathers and Dads After Divorce. Such groups objected to what they saw as sexism against men manifest through the existence of the Equal Opportunities Commission, a Minister for women and women-only events (Whelehan 2000: 121-122).

The late-modern context

Stacey (1987) suggests that postfeminism parallels the transition to a postindustrial society and the 'unmaking' of separate spheres. As industrial societies provided the impetus for feminist movements, so postindustrial conditions pave the way for postfeminism. 'Postindustrialization should be read as the unmaking of a gender order rooted in the modern nuclear family system,' Stacey argues (1987: 8). She regards postfeminism as the amalgam of feminism (or feminist ideals depoliticised) and nostalgia for the nuclear family that has arisen amidst increasing instability in family life, the decline of separate spheres and new forms of work. As 'feminised' occupations (information-based and service industries) and

flexible working patterns replace traditionally masculine full-time work like manufacturing, work is increasingly occupied by women *and* an arena for their exploitation as cheap and flexible labourers. Postfeminism exists in this new situation.

Stacey's thesis connects with the 'reflexive modernization' theory associated with Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens (and also Zygmunt Bauman, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim and Scott Lash). These theorists propose that western societies are moving to a new, late, 'radicalised' or 'liquid' modernity characterised by interrelated processes of 'reflexivity', 'detraditionalization', 'individualization' and 'risk' (Bauman 2000, 2001; Beck 1992, 1997, 1999; Beck et al. 1994; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 2001; Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1990, 1991, 1992, 1996; Lash 1993, 1999). *Reflexivity* at individual and structural levels becomes a requirement of social life. Knowledge and self-monitoring are prioritised and agency becomes freed from structure (or, as Lash [1993: 18] puts it, 'structure…forces agency to be free'). The process of *detraditionalization* weakens the traditions of modernity; traditions that remain face continual interrogation. Third, people become *individualized*, that is, they are compelled (including by the state and employers) to create themselves as individuals. This involves risk, as modernity's older certainties and structures are challenged.

It is argued that changes in gender patterns inhere in these processes, that men and women are now less restricted to gendered activities and characteristics. Modernity's tradition of gender-differentiated separate spheres is breaking down ideologically and practically, along with boundaries and binaries of class, ethnicity and sexuality, and is subject to continual challenge. Women are less confined to domesticity; men are less constrained to a breadwinner role. The state positions women and men not as, in 'solid' (Bauman 2000) or 'high' (Lash 1999) modernity, parts of enduring family units whose life course will be predictable. Instead they are individualized as 'reflexive selves' (Giddens 1991, 1992), individual citizens responsible for directing, and risking, their own biographies. However, I believe that while these processes form part of the postfeminist postindustrial context, the reflexive modernization thesis gives a one-sided picture of contemporary gender relations. It does not take sufficient account of the enduring influence on people's gender practices of discourses and practices of separate spheres (or recourse to them as part of an anti-feminist backlash) or feminism.[102]

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[102] Jacqueline Scott (1999) argues this with regard to reflexive modernization theories about family life.

Lisa Adkins makes an alternative and persuasive argument. Adkins proposes not that reflexivity, mobility and risk are destroying traditional constructions of gender, nor that despite such dismantling differences and inequality persist. These processes are not neutral, not 'disconnected from the constitution and ordering of gender and sexuality' (Adkins 2002: 125); gender and sexuality are not *worked upon* by these processes. Rather, she argues that gender and sexuality are central to these reworkings of the social. It is insufficient to speak of contemporary gendered inequalities as those of industrialised modernity, for they now take new forms, with new hierarchies, differences and divisions. Detraditionalization has been joined by re-traditionalization. Adkins (1998: 43) proposes that becoming an individualized worker 'relies upon, or is founded upon, the appropriation of women's labour in the private sphere'. She argues that a return to separate spheres is not occurring – women are not returning to the home – but rather the labour market is becoming an arena for the re-traditionalization of gender (2000). As corporations adopt quasi-familial socialities the patriarchal family becomes inscribed within the workplace; women receive lower pay since they predominate in jobs in the low paid welfare sector; and married management teams construct the husband as leader, salaried employee and reflexive worker and his wife as unsalaried assistant (Adkins 1995). Adkins also discusses the 'sexual labour' – looking sexy, engaging with suggestive banter – often expected from female employees (1998: 43-44). While I, unlike Adkins, emphasise gender traditionalism as an enduring influence (rather than highlighting how this traditionalism is reworked in reflexive modernity), we concur in our assessment that the contemporary situation combines old and new notions of gender.

Angela McRobbie's reflections on young women, feminism and postfeminism feed into this. McRobbie (1994: 158) proposes that young women are most identifiably postfeminist. Following her, I suggest that postfeminism is the particular but not exclusive domain of those who reached adolescence after the second-wave generation – women born after the mid 1960s. Following the reflexive modernization theorists McRobbie argues that young women have partially been 'unhinged' from traditional femininity, 'disembedded' from traditional social structures (2002; cf. Giddens & Pierson 1998: 98-99). She sees young women as increasingly reflexive, geographically mobile and able to escape barriers of gender, class or ethnicity. Yet she considers young women's 'unfixing' from traditional femininity partial, and her work on femininity within popular culture demonstrates both the breakdown and continuation of gender-based inequalities. Within this postfeminist tension

young women on the one hand win freedom from separate spheres femininity. But under the influence of New Right conservatism that criticises feminism they are still constrained by the older separate spheres gender discourse and are sometimes happy to rearticulate it as their personal choice. Their relationship with feminism manifests these ambiguities: while they express feminist views and are familiar with media discussions of feminist issues, they do not identify themselves as feminists because they associate feminism with an older generation and an image they believe opposes their desire for femininity (McRobbie 1994: 158). Popular culture's celebration of 'TV blondes' represents a partial endorsement of liberal feminist values and young women's drive and ambition, yet commercialises 'feminism' and excludes other (e.g. non-white) women (McRobbie 2000).

McRobbie (2002, 2003) links postfeminism to the New Labour government's treatment of feminism. New Labour Britain takes feminism into account, using rhetoric praising diversity and equal opportunities, yet rejects it as a discourse; the term 'sexism' has become unfashionable in a way that 'racism' has not (Williamson 2003). McRobbie (2003: 130) argues that the contemporary situation represents a 'double entanglement' she calls 'postfeminist':

> the co-existence of neo-liberal with liberal values in relation to families and sexuality, and the co-existence of feminism as that which is reviled or, as I would put it, 'almost hated', and feminism as a political force which has achieved the status of Gramscian common sense, something that is now 'taken into account.'[103]

Rayna Rapp (1988) questions the appropriateness of using 'postfeminism' (and Stacey's interpretation of it) to describe working-class and black women's experiences and politicisation of inequalities. Whether young men may be identified as postfeminist and how far postfeminism is present among women who are not white, middle-class or heterosexual needs further exploration. I consider postfeminism culturally specific and culturally variable: it is specific to western societies and varies according to factors like class, ethnicity and sexuality. However, depending as it does on discourses that have affected most British people, albeit differently, postfeminism is likely to be present in many sectors of British society. Separate spheres may have been constructed by the white middle classes, but its influence spread outside this constituency; though British feminism has been primarily white

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[103] Whether postfeminism could also be seen as a kind of Gramscian common sense is worth considering.

and middle-class, feminist ideas spread far beyond its activist 'membership'. Because postfeminism appears particularly applicable to white, middle-class, heterosexual, younger women it is especially useful for this thesis, since this group predominated in my fieldwork.

Using postfeminism in research on contemporary evangelicals and gender

The Introduction and Literature Review outlined four principal models operating in social research on evangelicals and gender: *conservative-egalitarian*, *plural*, *symbolic traditionalism and pragmatic egalitarianism* and *empowerment/oppression or structure/agency*. Although evangelicals' gender manifestations can be analysed through these frameworks I suggest the need for another paradigm, that of postfeminism. I have chosen this framework for the following reasons. First, a model is needed which does not dichotomise or polarise but provides room for the subtly diverse hues of Christian expressions of gender to be displayed. Second, my ethnographic fieldwork at NFI revealed particular distinctive sets of gender discourses and acts which should therefore be brought to light through a framework closely fitting the data; Chapter 2 discussed how grounded theory generated this framework. Third, because I consider the wider social context of contemporary Britain important the postfeminist framework takes account of the broader, non-religious context. Finally, because my thesis is concerned with *gender* within evangelicalism (rather than, say, ecclesiology or worship, for which the tools of religious studies or the sociology of religion would be more appropriate) I want to use social theories generated within women's studies and the sociology of gender.

In relating postfeminism to evangelicalism I am following Judith Stacey (see earlier). Stacey's research is significant for this thesis not only because she (with her co-writers) is the only academic studying evangelicals and gender who has used the postfeminist frame, but also because hers is the definition of postfeminism I regard as most accurate, and which my formulation takes most inspiration from. Based on findings from Stacey's ethnographic fieldwork between 1984 to 1987 at a small evangelical mission in Silicon Valley, Stacey and Gerard (1990: 99) argue that, contrary to most feminist understandings of evangelicalism as a conservative movement, 'evangelical theology and institutions are serving as remarkably flexible resources for renegotiating gender and family relationships, and not exclusively in reactionary or masculinist directions'. They note the breadth of evangelical political and

theological orientations, an observation that dovetails with some of the existing literature. They trace the development of American evangelical feminism, noting its parallel timescale to the secular second wave.[104] Referring to a 1980 Gallup Poll analysing support for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), they note that although a smaller number of evangelicals than non-evangelicals support the ERA (55% as opposed to 66%), the difference is relatively small, and that, as Hunter's (1987: 76-115) study of students from evangelical theological colleges demonstrates, younger evangelicals affirm a mixture of conservative and feminist attitudes to gender.

Some scholars criticise work (such as Stacey and Hunter's) that they consider too interested in secular feminism. They instead explore how evangelical gender patterns are constructed with reference to theology. It is not Victorian or feminist notions of gender that have produced the gendered realities of these Protestants, they argue. Rather, evangelicals' gender notions come from the Bible and have been constructed over a longer history. Gallagher (2003) depicts the curious amalgam of conservative and egalitarian attitudes to gender that Stacey calls postfeminist. Her 2002 paper points out how most evangelicals 'are both supportive and appreciative of the gains of liberal feminism, as well as concerned that feminism has "gotten off track" by promoting an excessive individualism that undermines stable, meaningful and caring relationships'. Yet Gallagher rejects Stacey's approach. Gallagher believes that in analysing evangelicals' gendered lives with reference to 'secular' society, scholars neglect the long history of competing gender ideals – a history that stretches, in America, from the seventeenth-century Puritans to the Promise Keepers today. If the twin trends she observes of male authority and mutuality are older than have been previously proposed, she considers evangelical theology a convincing 'source' for evangelicals' gender attitudes. Gallagher argues that both gender difference/hierarchy and gender egalitarianism have strong theological foundation. Conservative evangelical spokespeople maintain that male authority is rooted in the Trinity and the Creation narratives; evangelical feminists justify their egalitarianism using the same Bible passages.

However, situated as evangelicals are in a social context where many, probably most (certainly in Britain where evangelicals are a small minority), of their social interactions will be with non-evangelicals, I would caution against this approach. Perhaps because her research focuses on America, where evangelicals are many and so better able to shield

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[104] Unlike British evangelical feminism, which occurred later (see Chapter 4).

themselves from non-evangelicals, Gallagher underestimates the influence of contemporary 'secular' gender ideas upon evangelicals. Gallagher can also be criticised for ignoring the relationship between the Bible and culture. Doreen Rosman (1992) documents expertly how the Bible and the social context intermingle in her study of evangelical attitudes to culture in England, 1790-1833. Texts are not interpreted in a vacuum. Literal reading is hardly possible, for, given the Bible's shifts and contradictions in emphasis, genre, audience etc., it is and must be interpreted within a specific culture. Evangelicals may claim their gender ideals derive directly from the Bible, but these 'biblical' ideals are mediated through their cultural understandings.

Others dismiss analyses focusing on postfeminism. Brasher (1998: 164) argues that 'the use of terms such as "postfeminist" or "antifeminist" to describe the role of fundamentalist women in contemporary American identity politics misconstrues the complex sociopolitical positions that Mount Olive and Bay Chapel women espouse.' But this criticism is dependent on interpreting postfeminism as 'anti-feminism'; such a critique is, I agree, off the mark in ignoring the presence of feminist concerns in evangelical Christianity. If postfeminism is as Stacey and I define it, Brasher's criticism becomes void.

Stacey's work on evangelicals and postfeminism provides a framework on which to build and through which to explore gender relations amongst contemporary British evangelicals. My thesis adds to Stacey's in several ways. First, it is concerned with Britain rather than America. Second, it engages with feminist, cultural and sociological theorising of postfeminism produced in the last decade and a half since Stacey's seminal work to produce a fuller exploration and delineation of postfeminism, as well as one geared particularly to the British context. Third, while Stacey is centrally concerned with marriage and the family she leaves unexplored important areas of gender relations in evangelicals' lives including singleness, sexuality and the gendering of congregational activities and worship. Additionally, Stacey's greater interest in women and femininity leave men's understandings and practices of masculinity insufficiently addressed. The broader focus of my thesis seeks to fill these gaps.

Stacey and Gerard (1990: 111-112) write of postfeminist evangelicalism:

> Generated partly as a backlash against feminism, postfeminist evangelical gender ideology also selectively incorporates and adapts many feminist family reforms.

> Secular and biblical feminists alike, we believe, can take credit for the extraordinary diffusion of our ideological influence on even this most unlikely of constituencies. Women's turn to evangelicalism represents a search not just for spirituality, but for stability and security in turbulent, contested times; but it is a strategy that refuses to forfeit, and even builds upon, the feminist critique of men and the 'traditional' family. Acute 'pro-family' and spiritual longings in this period commingle with an uncompleted, but far from repudiated feminist revolution. Part of the genius of the postfeminist evangelical strategy is its ability to straddle both sides of this ambivalent divide.

Postfeminism, this amalgam of separate spheres, feminist and backlash discourses enacted in a late-modern context, is most vividly understood through empirical examples. It is a framework that readily allows the tensions, contradictions, origins and forms of gender in NFI to be displayed. Chapters 4-8 will begin by outlining postfeminist configurations of church roles, marriage, masculinity and women's singleness. These understandings will be used as a lens through which to discuss the gender practices I encountered at NFI and Westside church.

Chapter 4

Gender in NFI's Public Settings: Publications and Conferences

Introduction

This chapter and the next address most Westside members' interpretation of my research topic: 'the role of women in the church'. Although I sometimes corrected them, this interpretation of my shorthand 'gender in NFI' stuck. Since this is the case it is important to begin by investigating how gender is constructed in their public congregational settings. Subsequent chapters discuss wider constructions of marriage, masculinity and women's singleness.

Regular congregational gatherings provide the focal point for evangelicals' expressions of communal faith. However, researchers have paid less attention to congregational gender practices than those of home and family. Where congregational gender practices are analysed, two themes predominate. First, as I demonstrated in the Introduction and Literature Review, gender is highlighted as an issue of congregational conflict. A second is the relationship between male overall congregational authority and moderated female influence; this pattern gives women varying degrees of religious influence while confining ultimate authority to male leaders. Elaine Lawless (1988, 1991) demonstrates how despite men's monopoly on official preaching and leadership, Pentecostal women dominate the section of the service open to spontaneous prayer, speaking in tongues and giving 'testimonies' about God's work in their lives. They become quasi-preachers, appealing to God's unexpected calling to justify their speaking or giving extended testimonies. Women similarly numerically dominate British black churches, many of which are Pentecostal. They sustain the church yet do so under the official leadership of men (Foster 1992). Brasher (1998: 58-90) shows men's dominance in evangelical congregational life; while women in this sphere have few outlets for their talents, the 'women's ministry' programme functions as

an 'enclave' where women do what is forbidden to them in the main congregation, namely preach and lead authoritatively.

Postfeminism has not been used as a framework to investigate congregational gender practices. Filling this gap, this chapter explores what postfeminist configurations of church life constitute. It delineates separate spheres, feminist, backlash and postfeminist beliefs and patterns in British evangelical church life and then applies them to NFI's public settings.

Separate spheres church life

During modernity religion was increasingly feminised, with more women attending church and engaging in private devotional practices, a pattern that continues today (Davie 1994; Walter & Davie 1998; Brown 2001). Reasons for this remain relatively unexplored, but the separation of home and workplace is a probable factor. As women's geographical mobility narrowed, church provided a social circle. Callum Brown's (2001) oral history and popular cultural material shows the increasing construction of women as religious and men as irreligious from 1800. Injunctions for Christians to renounce 'the world' for domestic piety meant that men, who occupied the 'worldly' public sphere, were regarded as less religious (Davidoff & Hall 1987: 90). Attitudes advocated as appropriate Christian behaviour (such as self-sacrifice) were more commonly taught to, and believed inherent in, women – particularly middle-class women. Unsurprisingly, then, though working-class evangelical membership was higher than it might have been, the middle classes proportionally outstripped the working classes in church attendance (Clark 1995: 92-118). Male evangelicals sought to minimise their involvement in the public sphere, which led to accusations that they were 'unmasculine'. Because evangelicals considered many 'masculine' pursuits sinful, they needed a Christian form of masculinity. Work, love of home and responsibility in business were reinscribed as masculine Christian virtues (Davidoff & Hall 1987: 107-118).

Church attendance may have been feminised, but church leadership was not, which calls into question, as Percy (2001: 99) remarks, the description of nineteenth-century piety as feminised. Since the church was regarded as a reflection of the family where womanhood was equated with a subordinate wife and mother role (Davidoff & Hall 1987: 114), it was considered proper for church leaders to be male. Priests, preachers and ministers were almost

exclusively men. The new opportunities the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival produced for (particularly working-class) women as preachers in dissenting groups like Methodism fell away in the nineteenth century as cottage religion became institutionalised and support for separate spheres gathered momentum (Valenze 1985; Davidoff & Hall 1987: 107, 119, 130-140).

This proposed connection between evangelicalism and congregational gender conservatism is, however, questioned. For contributors to Sue Morgan's (2002a) collection the church transcended and problematised the notion of two, separate, gendered spheres. The activities of religious *women* pose such challenges, argues Morgan (2002b: 16), that they may require separate spheres' 'dissipation' as an ideological term. Discussing nineteenth-century Quaker women Sheila Wright (2002: 90) posits that the church and women's religious activities (which crossed boundaries implied by the term 'church' and included missionary, philanthropic and educational work) constituted a third, 'spiritual,' sphere. The church operated as a new community or family providing shelter from the 'ensnaring world' (Davidoff & Hall 1987: 100), undercutting the idea that families were male-headed and nuclear. Christians also preached spiritual equality; however firm separate spheres doctrines were, the belief that Christians were 'all one in Christ Jesus' formed 'a base line for discussions on the religious natures of men and women' (Davidoff & Hall 1987: 107).

But since church leadership remained almost entirely male and this was upheld in accordance with gender-differentiated doctrines, I consider it inappropriate to dispense with notions of separate spheres in congregational settings. The new opportunities laywomen gained for church work that was not simply domestic – visiting the sick, teaching children in Sunday schools, writing (tracts or hymns etc.) and informal evangelism (Davidoff & Hall 1987: 140-148) – often accorded with separate spheres conceptions of nurturing, maternal femininity.

Despite women's public activity in evangelicalism, their greater role during the Evangelical Revival as preachers among the non-conformist Methodists, pioneers of the Sunday School movement (Rendall 1985: 73-107) and patrons if they were upper-class, it remains the case that, as Helen Jones (2002) argues for the eighteenth century, the gender boundaries circumscribing women's religious authority that kept them from church leadership remained intact. In Methodism the doctrine of spiritual gender equality did not extend to thoroughgoing practical equality. Eighteenth-century female preachers 'never

defied the constraints of gender; they merely stretched and manipulated them' (Clark 1995: 97). And by the early nineteenth century Methodists were disallowing female preaching, advocating instead women's domestic role. Though non-conformist independent prophetesses like Joanna Southcott at the turn of the century demonstrated the possibility for female spiritual leadership if it was believed to be divinely ordained, they did not use their position to advance women's status (Clark 1995: 92-118). While the late-Victorian evangelical movement the Salvation Army unusually opposed women's exclusion from church leadership in the established denominations, opening all positions to women (P. Walker 1998), its practice fell short of its egalitarian ideal. Andrew Eason (2003) demonstrates how the Salvation Army replicated the Victorian notion of sexual difference I call separate spheres; its evangelical theology was particularly influential in perpetuating separate spheres.

Separate spheres ideology continued its powerful influence upon evangelicalism, particularly in evangelicalism's most conservative forms. Betty DeBerg (1990: vii-viii) shows how American fundamentalists set about 'maintaining Victorian gender roles well into post-Victorian times'. Utilising separate spheres as a way of describing changes in gender roles arising alongside nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, DeBerg argues that first-wave fundamentalists opposed the activities of first-wave feminists who had challenged gender differentiated roles. Fundamentalists aimed to reassert separate spheres ideologies and practices, in particular glorifying motherhood. Margaret Bendroth (1993) shows over a broader period how Christian fundamentalists sought to reinstate this sexual division of labour, diminishing women's congregational opportunities. Rhetorical promotion of male authority based on a Calvinist theology of 'God's created order' of male leadership and female submission has continued to be an important feature of fundamentalism, she claims, as has reclaiming Christianity as 'manly', not feminised.

Feminist church life

If women's church roles were limited under separate spheres to activities that dovetailed with their presumed 'natural' aptitude for childcare and supporting men, Christian feminists reinstated women's right to religious authority and leadership. In Victorian Britain while many – probably most – evangelicals, particularly in the established churches,

supported gender differentiation in church activities, others favoured more liberal interpretations of the Bible to allow women greater public roles (Helsinger et al. 1983: 165-211; Heeney 1988; Davidoff & Hall 1987: 133; Wilson 2000). Female preachers in the 1860s second evangelical revival argued that, properly understood, the Bible encouraged female preaching (Anderson 1969); the Salvation Army subsequently allowed women considerable speaking opportunities. Although evangelicalism contributed to the development of separate spheres, it also drove first-wave feminism in Britain and America (Hardesty 1984; Rendall 1985: 73-107); Olive Banks (1981) lists evangelical Christianity as one of three major intellectual traditions within feminism.[105] However, it remains difficult to delineate specific *feminist* challenges to male-only church leadership or preaching: often supporting women's domestic and societal subordination, women preachers rarely identified themselves as feminists (Anderson 1969).

The 1970s and 1980s British Christian feminist movement is 'a neglected aspect of British "second-wave" feminism' (Daggers 2002: xiii). Born a few years after the 'secular' women's liberation movement, it revolved around four broad axes: the post-1960s cultural shift (which in Daggers' account includes the women's liberation movement) that set in motion shifts in the churches; the debate over women's ordination in the Anglican church; the reclamation of the symbol of Eve; and diverse groups claiming allegiance to the wider Christian women's movement.

The British evangelical feminist (or 'biblical feminist', as they prefer) movement did not emerge until the mid 1980s. In North America evangelical feminism began a decade earlier, when the Evangelical Women's Caucus formed in 1974-1975. 1974 saw the publication of Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty's groundbreaking *All We're Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation* (Quebedeaux 1987; Watt 1991: 93-117). In London in 1985 an evangelical conference on feminist issues attracted five hundred people. The conference was sponsored by the Evangelical Alliance (the national British association of evangelicals) and the evangelical think-tank the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity. Keynote speaker Elaine Storkey (1985b) presented 'the feminist case against the church'. That year Storkey had published the book *What's Right with Feminism*, presenting evangelical feminism as the theologically accurate 'third way' between evangelical

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[105] Banks identifies the others as Enlightenment philosophy and socialism.

conservatism and secular second-wave feminism (Storkey 1985a). From this conference the Men, Women and God (MWG) Trust formed; its mission was:

> to help women and men talk and work together towards the vision of 'in Christ there is neither male nor female, but all are one'; and to demonstrate to the world, in particular the feminist movement, that the gospel is good news after all. We believe that where women experience Christ's liberation to be themselves, men will too. (Anon. 1987a)

MWG ran conferences, local discussion groups, spoke at evangelical events (Anon. 1987a; Anon. 1987b) and produced a book (Keay 1987). British evangelical feminism's heyday lasted from the late 1980s until the early 1990s,[106] aided by Church of England debates about women's ordination. A stream of British and American-authored evangelical feminist books appeared in Britain from the mid 1970s, increasing to a late 1980s and early 1990s peak, before gradually slowing down (Pape 1978; E. Stagg & F. Stagg 1978; Evans 1983; Langley 1983; Storkey 1985a; Gundry 1987; Hayter 1987; Keay 1987; Keay 1988; Hull 1989; Robson 1989; Noble 1990; Van Leeuwen 1990; Brown 1991; Scott 1992; Van Leeuwen 1993; Kroeger et al. 1995; Storkey 1995; Lutz 1997; Cunningham & Hamilton 2000; Storkey 2000).[107]

The British evangelical feminist movement framed itself as a Christian response to second-wave feminism. It can be seen as a Christian adaptation of second-wave feminism, but with a cultural lag of at least ten years.[108] Evangelical feminists stand at the conservative end of reformist feminist theology.[109] Theirs is a liberal feminism that seeks women's increased participation in existing church structures rather than reformation or removal of the

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[106] MWG still exists.

[107] American authored evangelical feminist texts which were not published in Britain are not listed because their influence on British evangelicals is small.

[108] William Fielding Ogburn (1957: 167) introduced the concept of cultural lags. These 'occur when one of two parts of culture which are correlated changes before or in greater degree than the other part does, thereby causing less adjustment between the two parts than existed previously'.

[109] Christian feminist theology began in the late 1960s, a little later in Britain than in America, producing its core texts in the 1980s, before diversifying in the 1990s (Walsh 1999; Clifford 2002: 29-30; Ruether 2002). It is divisible into three main stances: reformist, revisionist and revolutionary. No standard typology of feminist theology exists, so this is my own. Ursula King (1989: 168-175) describes two major orientations in feminist theology: reformist and radical/ revolutionary. My typology is closest to Anne Clifford's 'reformist, reconstructionist, revolutionary' version (2002: 32-38); similarly June O'Connor (1989) identifies three 'Rs' of 'rereading', 'reconceiving' and 'reconstructing' traditions. See Hogan 1995's alternative.

structures. They seek equality through mutual submission in gender relations and sometimes advocate using inclusive language for humans (though not for God).

In a creation-fall-redemption framework evangelical feminist theologians hold that God created man and woman in his image and commissioned them to rule and reproduce together (Genesis 1-2). At the fall, the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, sinned, the consequence of which is role differentiation: the woman takes on the childbearing role and the man the worker role (Genesis 3). Of particular significance is Genesis 3:16: 'To the woman he said, "…Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."' Because of the fall, men dominate women, who respond by over-depending on men. Jesus' life, death and resurrection institute a new age in which women and men can receive forgiveness from sin and its consequences, including gender-specific ones. Skipping to Jesus' ministry, evangelical feminists argue that Jesus' treatment of women was revolutionary for his time: the fall heralded a patriarchal culture, but Jesus gives women a more prominent status, as witnesses to his resurrection, for example. Despite isolated prohibitions against women having authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12) or speaking in church (1 Corinthians 14:34-35), they claim that the balance of evidence demonstrates that early Christianity liberated women from the restrictions their culture placed upon them. Paul's words in Galatians 3:28, often understood as the 'Magna Carta' of Christian feminism,[110] are taken as a decisive statement of gender equality: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'. 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is understood as a temporary culture-dependent prohibition, while 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is contradicted by 1 Corinthians 11:5 which assumes women's vocal church roles. Evangelical feminists deny that the New Testament promotes a God-ordained authority or 'headship' structure in which men are placed over women. They claim that conservative evangelicals have misread the Greek term for head (*kephalē*) in 1 Corinthians 11:3[111] as 'authority', when it actually denotes source or origin and refers to the Genesis 1-2 creation accounts. Chapters such as Romans 16 detail women's involvement in the early church in leadership, even apostolic, positions.

Evangelical feminism probably increased approval of female church leaders. The fight for women's ordination in the Church of England is a case in point. When in 1992 the

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[110] A comment attributed to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza that I have been unable to locate.
[111] 'The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.'

motion to ordain women priests was finally carried, it was widely attributed to a change of attitude amongst evangelical clergy (Barclay 1997: 122; France 2000: 5; Tidball 1996: 263). While the evangelical feminist movement was probably not the sole cause of this change in opinion,[112] it had some impact.

Backlash church life

Evangelical feminism, I have shown, occurred around a decade after second-wave feminism, the movement which I see as key to postfeminism; there have thus been two feminist movements to which evangelicals – and where this thesis is concerned, NFI – responded: one secular, one evangelical. Evangelicals have participated in two 'waves' of backlash against feminism, first against second-wave feminism, second against evangelical feminism.

The backlash against second-wave feminism from the 1970s: the House Church movement

As I began suggesting in Chapter 1 the House Church movement is wedded historically to the gender and sexual shifts of the 1960s and 1970s. Charting these attitudinal shifts, Martin (1981: 24) remarks that the 1970s set off a series of defensive movements that 'resist[ed] the wider value shift by focusing on particularly evocative symbols.' Restorationism, the Festival of Light and Mary Whitehouse's NVALA were three such movements. Adventist eschatology, growing interest in the devil in films like *The Exorcist* in the early 1970s and the changes in sexual morality further convinced House Church Christians that sex and violence were 'the marks of Satan's kingdom' (Walker 1987: 205). For Festival of Light and NVALA supporters, social conflict between structure (the establishment) and anti-structure (the counter-culture) was manifested through campaigning around particular adopted symbols. Sex was one symbol around which people became polarised, into groups for and against free sexual expression (Martin 1981). The moral

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[112] Other factors contributing to liberalising evangelical attitudes to gender probably included changing work patterns in society, secular second-wave feminism and developments in biblical hermeneutics which discouraged biblical literalism in the 1970s (years which were important in the debate about whether women should be ordained) (Bebbington 1989: 268-269).

campaigning organisations agitated in support of the nuclear family and a conservative sexual morality, becoming identified with the New Right anti-feminist backlash described in Chapter 3.

House Church members' interpretations of the 1960s and 1970s changes in gender and sexual behaviour led them to adopt gender differentiation as vital to their theology and practice. Restorationists failed to distinguish between second-wave feminism and the sexual counter-culture. Conflating and rejecting both, they considered 'sexual permissiveness' and 'women's liberation' inextricably linked.[113] The 'News Front' section of the House Churches' magazine *Restoration* regularly carried negative reporting about sexual liberation and feminism.[114] For example, one 1983 issue featured stories headed 'Sad spread of "Love Bug"' (denouncing the rise of genital herpes), 'TV Decency: A Thing of the Past?' (highlighting the work of Mary Whitehouse and the Festival of Light), 'Fewer Soho Sex Shops' (praising Westminster City Council for limiting the number of sex shops) and 'Women's Lib – The Real Thing' (describing conversions among women in India) (Anon. 1983). Early Restorationist publications and sermons record the perception that feminism is 'of the devil' (Jones 1984). This interpretation of feminism is the primary reason why separate spheres became such a key feature of the Restorationist movement. Restorationists' promotion of the male-headed nuclear family was facilitated by the fact that House Churches stood out from other churches in having a near equal balance of men and women (A. Walker 1998: 200), making it possible for most to find marriage partners from the House Church constituency.

The influence of Brethrenism was another factor in Restorationism's separate spheres emphasis (Walker 1984: 213, 1987: 266). Many Restorationist leaders previously belonged to Brethren churches (though Virgo did not). Despite large proportions of female members (Brown & Mills 1980: 14), the Brethren still require women's silence in church.[115] Compared to Brethrenism, women joining Restorationism would have experienced significant freedom, for there they were allowed to practice the charismata: prophesying, praying for people to be

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[113] The sexual counter-culture and feminism shared some ground, for example their acceptance of some non-marital sexual relationships. My point is that the House Church movement failed to notice the areas in which they differed.

[114] News Front's two most popular story topics were a) accounts from around the world of Christian conversions, revivals and persecutions and b) gender and sexual behaviour in British society.

[115] A 1978 survey of leaders of 250 British Brethren assemblies found that over three quarters believed that women should not be allowed to speak at main 'Breaking of Bread' services. Only a third allowed women to pray audibly there (Brown & Mills 1980: 49, 12).

healed and speaking and singing in tongues – practices Brethren Christians reject.[116] The Fort Lauderdale Five (discussed in Chapter 1), whose discipling and authority doctrines required women's submission in the church and marriage (A. Walker 1998: 98), contributed to Restorationists' attitude to gender.

Adrian Hastings (2001: 610-11) regards the debate over women's ordination to have been the Church of England's most divisive issue in the 1970s. The Methodist Conference had voted for gender equality in 1971, ordaining its first women in 1974 (Hastings 2001: 623) and setting a possible precedent for the Church of England. Because it was a divisive issue Restorationist observers may have wanted to take a position on women's ministry early on in their movement to prevent similar disputes within their ranks. Indeed, *Restoration* magazine's news section regularly observed critically other denominations' decisions to accept women leaders. In 1985 *Restoration* reported: 'Women leaders in the Church of England could become a reality by the 1990s, despite it being forbidden in Scripture (1 Timothy 2:12), following a vote by the Church's parliament, the General Synod' (Anon. 1985).

House Church gender ideology was fuelled from the late 1970s by the rise of Thatcherite Conservative politics and the New Right, whose ideology of the separate spheres family Restorationists endorsed. While Restorationists were not explicitly aligned to right-wing politics, they were, of all evangelical movements, the most politically conservative.[117] 1980s Restorationists, along with other British charismatic evangelicals, possessed an optimistic entrepreneurialism which may have originated in or been strengthened by the similar ethos of Thatcherite Conservatism (Latham 2003). It is probably no coincidence that the halcyon days of the House Churches, the first half of the 1980s, matched those of the Conservative government, and that decline in both set in at a similar time.

The backlash against evangelical feminism from the late 1980s

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[116] Terry Virgo's (2001: 80) autobiography shows how his practice of allowing women to participate vocally through prayer, praise and prophecy was understood as a radical break with gender traditionalism for some in the first church he took over leading; one former Exclusive Brethren couple left the church as a result.
[117] The International Social Survey Programme found that British churchgoers, particularly Protestants, were more likely to support the Conservative party than non-churchgoers (Heath et al. 1993: 70). A survey of voting habits during the 1992 election found that of all evangelicals, New Church members were most likely to vote Conservative (Brierley 1997: 5.8).

While evangelical feminism appears to have had an impact obvious from the 1992 vote to ordain women as Anglican priests, a backlash against it began in the late 1980s. A similar phenomenon occurred in North America, where in 1998 the Southern Baptist Convention added to their 1963 Baptist Faith and Mission Statement the amendment: 'A wife is to submit graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ' (Franks 2001: 85). Two years later they voted to restrict the office of pastor to men (Clifford 2002: 154). David Harrington Watt (1991: 119-136) charts a backlash against American evangelical feminism that began from the mid 1970s, noting the work of 'counterfeminists' like Elisabeth Elliot, whose books (published in British editions in 1979, 1980, 1981 and 1985) British anti-feminist evangelicals have continued appealing to. Essentially, this backlash opposed evangelical feminism as erring in biblical interpretation. By giving increased weight to 'human reason' and 'the thoughts and prejudices of our own culture – a culture that is increasingly secularistic' (Foh 1979: 3) and seeing women's experience as a criterion of biblical interpretation, biblical feminism compromised biblical authority (Kassian 1992), they argued. Furthermore, they believed biblical feminists were denying or trying to remove God-given differences between men and women.

The British backlash encompassed two notable elements:[118] the related activities of Reform and the Proclamation Trust, and the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW). The Proclamation Trust was created in 1988 by a group of evangelical Anglican clergy disturbed at what they perceived as a liberalisation of British evangelicalism. Attracting evangelical Free Church support, it became known for its (quite literalistic) emphasis on expository preaching and its courses and networks for preachers. Some of the Trust's key figures were converted through the Iwerne Minster summer camps for public school boys set up by E.J.H. Nash in the 1930s to encourage the conversion of future influential men; the Trust's emphasis on differentiated gender roles can be traced partly to Iwerne's separate spheres gender teachings and practices (illustrated in Eddison 1983: 12; Mullins 1983: 97-105; Rhodes-James 1983: 26-27). In 1993, in the wake of the decision to

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[118] There were others. One important British backlash text is David Pawson's (1988) *Leadership is Male*. Its original subtitle (dropped from later editions) was 'A Challenge to Christian Feminism'. Pawson argues that while men and women possess 'vertical equality' (in relation to God), they possess, by God's intention, 'horizontal inequality' in relation to each other. Pawson is not directly involved in the backlash networks I describe.

ordain women as priests, the related group Reform was established to support clergy opposed to women's ordination and to contest the ordination of women as bishops and of practising homosexuals and lesbians (Barclay 1997: 123-124).[119] Within Proclamation Trust and Reform circles, opposition to women in overall church leadership has strengthened since 1992 and is often considered emblematic of evangelical orthodoxy (Aune 2003).[120]

The second element of the backlash against evangelical feminism, CBMW, was established in 1987 in America as a response to the rise of evangelical feminism. 'Men and women are equal in value, yet called to fulfil different callings,' CBMW (1998) assert (see also Piper and Grudem's key 1991 text *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*; Grudem 2002; Grudem & Rainey 2003). For CBMW the essential characteristic of masculinity is leadership, while the essence of femininity is response. The 'Danvers Statement', CBMW's 1988 position statement, affirms 'the glad harmony portrayed in Scripture between the loving, humble leadership of redeemed husbands and the intelligent, willing support of that leadership by redeemed wives' (Piper & Grudem 1991: 469). Within the church, only men may operate in ultimate leadership. Women may adopt 'complementary' roles consistent with their 'helper design' (James 2002). In 1998 CBMW established a British branch, which disseminates a newsletter advertising literature (e.g. Benton 2000, James 2002 and the CBMW twice-yearly journal) and runs day conferences.

The gender theology of these conservative[121] evangelical backlash groups sees a distinction between men and women's roles ordained within the Genesis 1 and 2 creation accounts. Men and women are in God's image, yet Eve's designation as 'helper' (Genesis 2:18) is understood to indicate the presence of essential gender differences that can be summed up in a pattern of masculine leadership and female submission. At the fall,

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[119] See the website www.reform.org.uk. Sandom 2002: 33-36 outlines Reform's position on women.

[120] Barclay's 1997 history of British evangelicalism takes this perspective. Barclay distinguishes those he calls 'Liberal Evangelicals' from 'Classical or Conservative Evangelicals'. He claims 'Liberal Evangelicals' have abandoned biblical orthodoxy, citing their acceptance of women's leadership as evidence.

[121] Labelling the two poles of evangelical gender theologies is difficult. 'Evangelical feminists' generally call themselves 'egalitarians' or 'biblical feminists', while 'conservatives' prefer 'complementarian.' 'Evangelical feminists' and 'conservatives' often dislike labels because they believe their viewpoint is 'biblical' rather than being a product of feminism or conservatism. Moreover, evangelical feminists dislike the fact that conservatives call themselves complementarian, claiming that complementarity is also part of the evangelical feminist theology. Likewise, conservatives dislike the term 'egalitarian' for evangelical feminists because ontological equality is also part of conservative gender theology. Evangelical feminists commonly call conservatives 'conservatives', 'hierarchicalists' and 'traditionalists'. Conservatives commonly call evangelical feminists 'evangelical feminists.' Because there appears no terminology both groups agree with for themselves and each other, I have opted for 'evangelical feminist' and 'conservative' because they appear the most accurate.

conservatives argue, Eve sinned by usurping her husband's leadership role; Adam sinned by following her into disobedience. In Genesis 3:16 (see earlier quotation) when God spells out the consequences of sin, the 'desire' the woman is said to experience towards her husband is understood as a tendency to manipulate and control men, while men's tendency is to dominate. As for evangelical feminists, Jesus' life, death and resurrection are believed to bring forgiveness from sin and its consequences and, in relation to gender, to set believers back on the path to God's ideal as manifested in Genesis 1-2. For conservatives, therefore, male leadership and female submission constitute redeemed gender roles. They buttress this with the observation that Jesus did not appoint female apostles and a doctrine they call 'male headship' based upon a reading of 1 Corinthians 11:3 which understands the Greek term for head to mean authority. Using a literalistic hermeneutic, the statements limiting women's role in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 are regarded as applicable for all times.

Postfeminist church life

Evangelicals' encounters with gender politics have resulted in both polarisation (with evangelicals vociferously either supporting or opposing feminist ideals [Storkey 1985a: 113-114]) and a combination of opposition and support that signifies postfeminism. One of the forms in which this postfeminist tension occurs is in divergence between belief and practice. Although quantitative research shows that a majority of British evangelicals support gender equality in church leadership,[122] the gap between ideology and practice is great. In 2000, only a tenth (10.4%) of Christian ministers were female. Moreover, the denominations containing the lower percentages of female ministers were often evangelical, meaning that the

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[122] Research reported by Heather Wraight (2001: 141-143) involved 478 members of the Christian Research association (not all evangelical). Nearly half (47%) reported enjoying working with or for a woman or women working for them. A similar number (43%) were not bothered either way. 87% agreed with the statement 'I welcome women in leadership and value their contribution' and 61% with 'The church has been influenced by society to undervalue the gifts of women', indicating strong support for women's ministry. Furthermore, 68% disagreed with the statement 'Women can be church leaders, just so long as they are subordinate to men,' and 76% with 'The Bible makes it clear that women should never be church leaders'. Wraight also found that 26% did not disapprove of women's leadership but would prefer a male leader. Sandra Baillie's (2002: 78-80) work on the more conservative Northern Irish context shows that Northern Irish evangelicals are divided – perhaps more accurately, polarised – about women's role in the church. While 47% approve of female ministers, 46% disapprove, with men slightly more likely than women to disapprove. Only 7% were undecided.

proportion of female evangelical ministers is closer to 5%.[123] Such a gap between ideological support for gender equality and its practical outworking has been explored in the American context by Mark Chaves (1997). Yet findings from NFI show something more complicated; I suggest that within a late-modern, individualized context in which older gender divisions are partially fragmenting, evangelical congregations comprise a combination of conservative and feminist attitudes to and practices of church roles that would more appropriately be labelled postfeminist. The rest of this chapter and the next illustrate this.

Postfeminist church life in NFI

Conservative discourses

Gender (and often gender-differentiated marriage, which I explore in Chapter 6) is foundational to key tenets in NFI theology. By this I mean that NFI lay upon gender essential Christian doctrines such as creation, fall, redemption and the Trinity, to the effect that gender difference is not incidental but central to NFI's theology.[124] The description of Adam and Eve from Genesis 2 (rather than the egalitarian Genesis 1 account) is taken as key to the doctrine of creation. God created Adam to rule over creation, before creating Eve as his helper. Others aspects of creation are discussed less often. Genesis 3:16 is read as a description of sin as female manipulation and male dominance. The Trinity are understood as uniquely male figures, despite the lack of attribution of masculinity to the Holy Sprit in the Bible. The redemption brought about through Jesus' death and resurrection is read as an indication that maleness is somehow more divine.[125]

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[123] In 2000 8.1% of New Church ministers were female, 6.1% of Pentecostal, 4.6% of Baptist and 2.6% of Independent ministers (Brierley 2001: 2.21).

[124] Theological discourse in NFI is primarily oral. No major or systematic theological approaches are set out in print, and NFI do not possess an official doctrinal position statement. However, the general tenets of NFI's theology can be gleaned from *NFI Magazine* and its precursor *Restoration*, recorded talks (generally from Stoneleigh Bible Week) and books by their leaders and other evangelical preachers. The descriptions of NFI's theology and theological anthropology that follow are based on my interpretation of this published and orally transmitted theology. See particularly Piper & Grudem 1991; Hosier 1998; Bell 2000; Devenish 1998, 2000; Betts 2001.

[125] NFI would probably object to this last claim, arguing, from Genesis 1:27 that men and women are equal bearers of God's image. However, I observed in NFI an underlying belief that because God is (they believe) male, masculinity is inherently more divine. I would not go so far as Mary Daly (1973: 19) ('If God is male,

Furthermore, the relationship between gender and these central doctrines is reciprocal. In other words, when the centrality of gender to major Christian doctrines has been established, these foundational doctrines are then utilised as frameworks to construct gender ideals and practices. The creation story is taken to support divinely ordained and/or 'natural' leadership of husbands over wives, whose role it is to submit to and help their husbands; the fall story is taken to repudiate women's assertion; the figures of the Trinity, read as hierarchically submitting to each other, are used to argue for women's submission to male leadership; Jesus' maleness is taken to disallow women from leading churches. Their theology is constructed upon notions of gender difference, just as ideals and practices of gender difference are constructed upon or out of key doctrines. Gallagher (2003) likewise shows how central gender is to evangelical theology, arguing that evangelicals' gender ideals (whether conservative or egalitarian) originate in – or, I would prefer, are constructed through – their theology.

Although Terry Virgo had minor involvement in CBMW (see below), NFI's gender ideology originated primarily in the reaction against the gender and sexual changes of the 1960s and 1970s. They are 'post' feminism in the senses of 'after' and 'anti-.' Claiming their gender ideology is biblical, they oppose my charge that they appropriate older separate spheres notions of gender. 'We don't aim to perpetuate a historic Victorian stance, dictating that women should be "seen and not heard". We simply and honestly believe that the Bible shows us that there are roles in the church that are gender-specific,' writes Terry Virgo (2001: 302).

While NFI are primarily aligned with a backlash against 'secular' feminism, they are not unconnected to the anti-evangelical-feminist backlash. It is plausible to suggest that NFI reasserted gender conservatism from the late 1990s. In 1998 Stoneleigh Bible Week was seen as an opportunity for 'restating' core NFI values (W. Virgo 1998); that year Wendy Virgo led a memorable seminar suggesting some women needed to renounce their manipulative 'Jezebellic Spirit' (this will be discussed shortly). In 2000 Stoneleigh held more sessions than usual on gender, devoting six seminars to 'man in the new millennium' and four to 'women in the new millennium', the (primarily conservative) content of which will be discussed in Chapter 7. A connection to CBMW's backlash against evangelical feminism is

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then the male is God'), but believe insisting God is ontologically male imputes greater godlikeness to men and is not in keeping with traditional theological orthodoxy (British Council of Churches 1989; Walker 1993).

evident: Terry Virgo was a patron of the British CBMW from 2001, although judging from CBMW's newsletters, conferences and website, his practical involvement was minimal. In 2002 Wayne Grudem, Vice President of CBMW, conducted a plenary session ('Gender Confusion – The Way Forward') and seminar ('The Biblical case for why some roles should be restricted to men') at NFI's leaders' conference. Another explanation for a reassertion of gender conservatism could be the perceived need to communicate their gender ideology to a new generation of young adults.

The presence of gender traditionalism is visible through three themes recurrent in NFI discourse: male church authority, the 'spirit of Jezebel' and the 'role of women.'

Male church authority

'Eldership' (overall leadership of a church) is considered an exclusively male role. This point is reiterated within sermons, books and articles by leading NFI figures. In 1997 NFI leaders' in-service training tackled 'the role of women', concluding that 'government in the church, for example apostolic ministry, eldership, preaching and teaching, is a male responsibility…In other areas there is room for diversity among us, within the framework of male headship' (Devenish 1998: 34). Wendy Virgo regularly argues that the New Testament advocates male-only eldership:

> In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul gives Timothy directions on recognition of elders and how they should conduct themselves. He clearly expects these to be men and teaches that women should not take authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12). In the light of the body of teaching to the church, it seems that women are to be fully involved in the life of the church in every way, but that the governmental roles are to be held by the men. They are the ones who are to be responsible and accountable to God for bringing direction to the church and to individuals in it. (W. Virgo 1989: 127)

Mike Betts (2001) uses this concept of authority, stating that male 'headship' is one of three vital paradigms of gender relations in the Bible (along with equality and complementarity). Citing 1 Corinthians 11:3 (see earlier) he explains that this institutes a principle of headship of men over women that mirrors God the Father's authority over Jesus. However, he adds, headship does not imply women's inferiority, simply their difference:

> The government role of leadership and oversight of a mixed congregation is prohibited to women because it is a headship responsibility and governmental and is therefore given to men – not because there is inequality but because there is difference of role.

Terry Virgo (2001: 301-303) defends NFI's male authority position in his autobiography:

> Though the gospel clearly brought a revolutionary breakthrough in attitudes to women and their full acceptance and equal value to men in the churches, we believe that male headship was clearly taught and practised. Jesus, who, as a rock of offence and a stone of stumbling, fearlessly cut through the traditions of his day and attacked all mere conformity to established norms, nevertheless chose twelve *men* to be apostles…
>
> Our specific areas of concern are church government, headship and the authoritative teaching and leading of men. We would regard these as territory forbidden to women by Scripture, not simply through what some people are pleased to interpret as the supposed caprice of a hard-faced, anti-woman, ex-Pharisee like Paul, but through the whole tenor of Scripture from beginning to end. In heaven it seems there will be neither male nor female; this is true of us in Christ now, in terms of our value and standing in his sight! But the New Testament, in dealing with gender-related issues, tends to take its standards by looking back to creation rather than forward to our ultimate heavenly state (see 1 Corinthians 11:8; Ephesians 5:31; 1 Timothy 2:13).

Yet NFI do not consider their prohibition against female elders 'official.' I asked Steve Blaber, head of NFI UK, if NFI had an 'official position statement on men's and women's roles'. He told me NFI had no 'statement of faith' or position statements. Rather:

> There are common values that we share…What you will find is all NFI churches share the common belief that eldership is a governmental role and, we believe male. In all other contexts, as I am sure you will have seen, women are involved in all sorts of leadership roles.
>
> I, therefore, think it important that your thesis makes it clear that NFI does not have an 'official line' but that churches do share common beliefs through working together under apostolic ministry.[126]

If ultimate male church authority is not legislated upon, there should surely be possibilities for female eldership. I sent an email to Blaber, asking 'Bearing in mind what you say about the high priority NFI place on relationships, does that mean that if an NFI church decided to appoint a female elder, they would be able to remain part of NFI (assuming that they shared

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[126] Email from Steve Blaber, 28th June 2001.

all other values with the rest of NFI)?' His PA sent the response 'I could not see this ever happening since there would have been a breakdown in relationship for it to have got to that point.'[127] Inbuilt within the relational structure of NFI, a structure in which local church decisions are vetted by those with apostolic oversight, then, is an unwritten rule maintained through social interaction between church elders and apostolic overseers that women cannot be elders.

The 'spirit of Jezebel'

Early in the Restoration movement Americans Don Basham and Derek Prince, two of the Fort Lauderdale Five, taught that a demonic 'spirit of Jezebel' existed that prompted people to resist the authority of those God had made leaders within the church. These teachings continued in various forms in the Restorationist churches that became NFI (e.g. Devenish 2000: 166-180; Watkinson 2000: 19-22). At Stoneleigh 1998 Wendy Virgo gave a talk in which she explained how she had been influenced by a Jezebellic spirit to challenge male authority (see Watkinson 2000: 19-22 for a similar view).

The biblical narrative of Jezebel, a Phoenician princess, describes her marriage to Ahab, King of Israel around the mid ninth century BCE (Hackett 1993). Their marriage signifies Ahab's rejection of Yahweh in preference for Baal, Jezebel's god (1 Kings 16:30-33). The section of the story Virgo uses to argue for the existence today of a 'Jezebellic' spirit concerns a vineyard belonging to Ahab's neighbour Naboth (1 Kings 21:1-29), that Ahab wanted as part of his garden. Naboth refuses Ahab's request. Jezebel responds by rebuking Ahab for not enforcing his request and says that she will obtain the vineyard for Ahab. Jezebel persuades two people to testify that Naboth has cursed God and the king, and when Naboth is stoned to death for this Ahab takes possession of the vineyard. Later, as predicted by Elijah, Jezebel dies a violent death (2 Kings 9:30-37). Her name appears in the book of Revelation (2:20) to refer to a prophet in Thyatira bringing false doctrines into the church (just as, the implication is, Jezebel brought the Israelites Baal worship) (Bauckham 2001: 1292).

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[127] Letter from Carol Harris, on behalf of Steve Blaber, undated (August 2001).

Wendy Virgo began her talk quoting Bible verses to demonstrate God's concern that order and boundaries – especially gender boundaries – are obeyed.[128] 'Headship' and gender differentiation were established by God for order, harmony and freedom, she states, and are represented symbolically in the biblical account by the vineyard. Just as on Ahab's behalf Jezebel subverts the vineyard's rightful ownership and purpose, so people today reject the proper purpose of masculinity and femininity. According to Virgo God created masculinity and femininity to be functionally distinct and endorse male authority. Jezebel and the 'Jezebellic spirit' manifested today symbolise the challenge to gender differentiated roles and male authority. 'Jezebel' operates today where people despise, or contrive to gain, authority. 'She' hides behind a 'camouflage of religiosity' but uses 'despicable' methods to 'get her way.'

While Virgo concedes that a Jezebellic spirit can influence men as well as women the following excerpt nearly negates this; she argues that male authority (and, it could be implied, desire for authority) represents God's rightful order, and that feminism is 'Jezebellic':

> There is what we term a Jezebellic spirit…marauding the earth. And she – I call her she but men also can be Jezebellic as well as women – but this evil spirit is seeking to undermine what God has put in place. And what we see so much depicted today I believe is because of an onslaught from…this demonic force that ultimately, of course, comes from Satan…We see the results of it all around us. We see men increasingly ineffectual, inadequate, effeminate, and, er, irresponsible, made a laughing stock. We see things like *Men Behaving Badly*[129] on the television, and all the time the undermining, the undermining of what true masculinity should be. And at the same time we are getting the rise and the rise and the rise of the feminist way of looking at things, so that it's coming to the point where people are saying 'women can do it all, we don't really need the men, we just need their se-men [laughs] to procreate…' Now I'm putting that very baldly but that is the, the kind of thinking that is coming more and more into our society. The putting down on the one hand and the raising up of the other, so that the balance is all distorted. Behind that is the Jezebellic spirit which is, it's not only um, as often, a sexual thing, but the ultimate aim, the ultimate goal of the spirit is control. And you see this is why it is so important that for us as Christians that women learn to submit to the headship of the man.

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[128] Her stress on gender boundaries brings to mind structuralist anthropologist Mary Douglas' (1966) *Purity and Danger*.

[129] 1990s sitcom about hapless would-be 'new lads' (see Chapter 7).

Virgo explained that some years ago she was influenced by a Jezebellic spirit to challenge her husband's authority and NFI's stance on male-only eldership:

> I got very unsettled for a couple of years by taking on board a lot of contemporary thought that was in conflict with the scripture. And I got depressed, I got confused, I began to question my whole calling, what I was supposed to be doing. I was resisting my husband's authority…I would pick up verses like 1 Timothy where it says 'a woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man' and I would do everything I could to get around it. I read every book I could find on the subject … I hated this word of God because I saw it as a restriction…I would keep on digging away at Terry and saying 'we must be more contemporary, we must be more modern, we must give women in New Frontiers scope in leadership, in eldership, to be involved in government and things like that.' And I was trying, like Jezebel, to use the scriptures, to distort the scriptures… I thought I loved the word of God. But God showed me one day 'you hate this bit. You don't love it. You don't submit to it. You submit to the bits you like'. And when he showed me that actually I had been attacked by a Jezebellic spirit and opened myself up to this spirit I was absolutely appalled.

Deciding her feminist attitudes were satanic, Virgo decided she should 'repent' to God and NFI's leaders.

After the Jezebel talk, according to Margaret (pseudonym), someone I interviewed who was on the official 'prayer team' at this session both weeks, those who considered themselves personally affected by a 'Jezebellic' spirit could approach the front of the hall and be prayed for. Margaret estimated that although a quarter of those present were men, only women requested prayer. The second week, the hall was 'eight deep' from the front after the talk with women 'shouting' and 'screaming' – exhibiting, Margaret explained, behaviour suggesting the presence of demons.[130] The fact that no men were available to pray for men,[131] she suggested, 'would imply that Wendy Virgo thinks of Jezebel as a problem afflicting women.'[132] Furthermore, given Wendy Virgo's approval of male authoritative tendencies, it is not surprising that only women believed they had 'Jezebellic' tendencies they needed deliverance from.

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[130] Interview with Margaret, Stoneleigh Bible Week, August 2001.
[131] Generally, NFI believe that 'prayer ministry' (focused, occasionally lengthy occasions where one or two people pray for someone, sometimes laying their hands upon them to confer God's blessing or healing) should be single-sex. As Franks (2001) observes, this shows engagement with counselling and social work practices (influenced by feminism) that recommend same-sex counselling.
[132] Email received from Margaret, 24th August 2001.

This event demonstrates the complex interplay of ideology and practice concerning gender. Wendy Virgo articulates an ideology that may practically in local churches be rejected or diluted as well as adopted. But she also *does* something as she speaks: she demonstrates the possibility that women may preach authoritatively, she demonstrates her special status as Terry's wife[133] and she prompts women's resubmission to male authority, evidenced by the dozens of women who approached the front of the room to renounce 'Jezebellic' behaviour. Men's presence at the seminar strengthened male authority in NFI. Virgo's message that women are especially liable to rebel against male church authority took a more central position than her regular Stoneleigh women-only seminars because it was directed to a mixed audience. Her personal authority appears great (although she minimises it with the statement 'I'm only teaching because as a woman under authority I was told to'), but the talk minimises women's collective authority. Further, the seminar implicitly permits men to monitor women's submissiveness. 'I say to you men here,' she declares, 'please don't be an Ahab because we women need you to be the strong covering that you were meant to be. Please be it for our sake and for the sake of the church.' (To 'be an Ahab' means, she explains, allowing women to 'tak[e] the ascendancy'). The role of Virgo's 'Jezebel seminar' in signalling a practical recommitment to male-only church leadership is significant, as its reception by Westside demonstrates (see Chapter 5).

The gendered concept of 'covering' is important to NFI. When women are described as 'covered' this means that they are under the (male) authority of their husband (if they are married) and/or their church leader. Begun partly in reaction to feminism, NFI's embrace of 'covering' is a neo-traditionalist return to an eighteenth-century description of married women's legal status (see Chapter 6). Although NFI's ideas are wedded to the non-religious elements of the recent anti-feminist backlash, 'covering' has been in recent decades a peculiarly Restorationist term.[134] The language of 'covering' was used frequently in R1 churches in the 1980s. A *Restoration* magazine article (Anon. 1983/1984) explains the concept. Rejecting the apparently widespread view that covering alludes to a hierarchical authority structure the writer explains that it denotes protection and concern for the welfare of one covered. A church leader 'covers' his church members and husbands 'cover' their wives. The biblical origin of the concept is cited as Genesis 9:20-27, where Noah's sons

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[133] I discuss leaders' wives later.
[134] This Christian usage of covering is not listed in the OED.

cover their drunken father with a garment to disguise his nakedness, and Ruth 3:9 where Ruth requests Boaz to spread his garment over her to symbolise his willingness to be her 'kinsman-redeemer'.

Virgo's interpretation of Jezebel, and her and other Stoneleigh attendees' actions based on that belief, are aligned with gender traditionalism and the anti-feminist backlash. They are traditional in asserting nineteenth-century separate spheres doctrines and in drawing on (consciously or not) a long tradition of interpretation of the Jezebel story that positions women as prone to sin and rebellion (Gaines 1999; Marlow 2004). They represent a backlash first, as Restorationism did, against secular feminism, in harking back to the teachings of Basham and Prince, and second against the evangelical feminist movement, whose books about biblical interpretation Virgo read during her 'Jezebellic' period.

The 'role of women'

Partly, perhaps (this is where NFI's backlash positioning come in) because of debates about women in society and the wider church, the 'role of women' has become a phrase NFI regularly utter not only to highlight it as a disputable issue, but also to assert in essentialist fashion that women have a separate role and sphere by virtue of their 'biological' sex. Betts (2001) and Terry Virgo (2001) speak of women's 'difference of role'. For Virgo, 'God has made us different and has given us different roles'; women, who are 'the weaker vessel', should be 'honoured.' 'We simply and honestly believe,' Virgo (2001: 303) writes, 'that the Bible shows us that there are roles in the church that are gender-specific and that if these principles are correctly observed we shall see women blossom and flourish into the beautiful potential God has for them.' Quantifying exactly what women's different role constitutes is not always easy, but it appears widely believed that women have particular abilities with childcare and the spiritual instruction of children, praying and caring for 'the poor' and offering hospitality (W. Virgo et al. 2001).

Feminist discourses

Releasing women to use their gifts

Despite these strong gender traditionalist statements about male authority, the spirit of Jezebel and the role of women egalitarianism is, though dimly, present in the concept of 'releasing' women to use their gifts. Qualifying statements accompany most articulations of the three conservative views above. In her 1989 book (quoted above) Wendy Virgo (1989: 122) also argues that it is important to focus on what women can do in church, rather than what they cannot:

> What dynamite do I have as a Christian woman? I have the same as a Christian man; that is, the life of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit and the word of God. They are given to me to help me live a life pleasing to God and to bring in his kingdom. This I do through the power of the gospel, the power of prayer and the gifts of the Spirit. Each of these is an umbrella which encompasses a vast number of activities, none of which is prohibited to women.

In an interview in the British evangelical magazine *Christianity and Renewal* Terry Virgo deflects focus on prohibitions against women's leadership by stressing women's numerous church activities:

> *Q: Some people consider New Frontiers does not encourage women.*
> A: I would strongly defend our reputation. My wife is very involved, as are many of our women, for example Kate Simmonds, who is one of the leading worship leaders in the country. And lots of our ladies are involved in many other areas of ministry. We have certain areas – eldership which we feel is not appropriate.
> *Q: You don't allow women to be 'in authority' of men.*
> A: Yes, we feel that is the biblical line. We feel comfortable that the matter of spiritual authority should lie with men. But our women are extraordinarily involved and I would say very fulfilled. They lead worship, are involved in baptising, breaking bread, leading cells, evangelism – there are many areas. But the area of eldership authority we feel is a male province.
> *Q: In this area you have gone the opposite way to many other churches. Has that been a problem within NFI churches?*
> A: Within our own ranks I think the ladies are very happy and fulfilled. Some people from outside, who are not first-hand involved, can get an image that is far removed from how it really is for us. (Fisher 2003)

Virgo is anxious to appear not to restrict women. He repeats 'involved' several times to stress women's participation in roles that include leadership. Women are 'happy and fulfilled', he argues, and juxtaposes 'involved' with 'fulfilled' in a way that suggests he concedes that only active involvement, perhaps congregational leadership, can fulfil women.

NFI's equality rhetoric is based around notions of 'gift.' NFI refer to biblical texts such as Romans 12:4-8[135] and 1 Corinthians 12-14 which argue that as different parts of the body of the church, everyone should exercise their distinctive gift or talent to benefit others. A focus on individuals' gifts and God-given 'callings' renders the gender question irrelevant, some claim. One woman I interviewed who worked full time for NFI for a number of years, one of the few single women to have attained public visibility, explained to me: 'If people recognise God's calling on your life they allow you space,' adding 'gender hasn't been a major issue for me. If God asks me to do something I obey him.'[136] In email correspondence an NFI pastor told me he believed 'men and women have been given different roles by God – roles that are different but equal', adding:

> Where I might differ with others [NFI leaders] is that I believe that one major function of our God given roles is to facilitate release not restriction. So the question some would ask is 'what can women do in the church?' I would rather think of it as 'how are women released in the church?' Then issues such as submission and headship etc. become modes to release not restrict.[137]

His priority is 'releasing' women to church activity. 'Release', which I came across regularly when NFI members discussed women's church participation, is a telling term because it implies that women have been restricted by something or someone they need to be released from. When I asked this pastor what he meant by 'release,' he told me it referred to a leader's role in encouraging his church members to fulfil God's plans for their lives. 'The question I ask [a member of my congregation] is "what do I (or another leader) need to do for you to release you fully to what God is calling you to do?" ' he explained.[138]

The pastor said he believed NFI congregational gender practices created greater opportunities for women than those of officially egalitarian churches. In conversation with a non-NFI pastor who advocates gender equality in ministry, he was, he said 'surprised to conclude that we have women fulfilling more key roles than him, with the exception of

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[135] 'Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us' (Romans 12:4-6a).
[136] Interview at 'Prayer and Fasting', King's Community Church, Hedge End, Southampton 8th February 2001.
[137] Email, 26th October 2000. His name is withheld because he did not want to appear as transgressing NFI's dominant understanding of men and women's congregational roles.
[138] Email, 3rd November 2000.

eldership (his wife is an elder)'.[139] During a Stoneleigh seminar advocating women's submission Wendy Virgo told a similar story:

> A few weeks ago I was…meeting some other Christian women…There were maybe fifteen women from all different streams[140] in this room and I was introduced to a lady whose first comment to me was 'I'm so glad to meet you. I've just been ordained as a Baptist pastor.' And then she went on to talk about how wonderful it is that Christian women are doing all sorts of things in the Christian world today and lots of women ordained and so forth. And then she said 'and what's going on in your scene?' And obviously I think she was trying to make a point that NFI means 'No Females Included'. Well, that makes me very angry actually because I look around our churches and I see women 100% involved at every level. And I get so cross when I hear about one woman, say in a Baptist church…being in leadership, but the rest of the women are passively sitting in the pews. But because one woman is elevated to leadership they consider themselves to be liberated. Well, I think we are far more active and involved and liberated because we've got women in cells, leading cells, in evangelistic outreach, leading worship, leading people to the Lord all the time, preaching in different sorts of groups, setting up crisis pregnancy, involved in ministry to the poor, baptising, taking communion round and I can't think of one area of church life where there aren't women involved, except that we don't have them as elders. But we don't have all the men as elders either. (Pettit 2000)

These observations may well be justified.[141] The conviction that each Christian has an active and valuable part to play in church may moderate NFI's ideological stance against women's leadership so that bar ultimate church leadership, women have many opportunities. I discuss in this and the next chapter how far this occurred in the settings I observed.

Intriguingly, the discourse of 'gifts' and 'service' to others is not the only language used to advocate women's participation. NFI have also, seemingly unconsciously, adopted feminist rhetoric to argue for women's greater church involvement, as the language of 'release' and 'liberated' in the extracts above indicates. 'Release,' 'liberation' and (more rarely) 'empowerment' do not originate in the Bible.[142] NFI do not back up their use of them with biblical references as they do with 'gifts' and 'service'. Rather, 'empower,' 'release' and 'liberate' have entered NFI as a kind of 'common sense': it is accepted that women

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[139] Email, 3rd November 2000.
[140] Church networks or denominations.
[141] Even among New Church networks who support gender equality, women leaders are still in the minority. Brierley (1999: 9.12-9.13) suggests women accounted for 30 of 114 leaders in the Pioneer network in 1995 and 6 of 32 leaders in Ichthus in 1998.
[142] This is not to say that the Bible is unconcerned with liberation – feminist and liberation theologians demonstrate that liberation for the oppressed is at the heart of biblical concern – but rather that its calls for liberation are not articulated in feminist language.

should be released, empowered and liberated. In understanding contemporary Britain as postfeminist, McRobbie (2003: 130) similarly argues that feminism 'has achieved the status of Gramscian common sense', in that it is now 'taken into account.' NFI's language of liberation comes from feminism's filter-down effect in British culture; just as 'equal rights' feminism has entered British culture as an accepted value-system (though equality is still significantly unachieved and opposed by some), so feminist concepts encountered in the process of interaction with British society and culture and with Christian feminist currents, have influenced NFI.

The postfeminist amalgam in public church life

The practical influence of these conservative or feminist discourses needs examination. Chapter 6 demonstrates a divergence between ideology of male marital authority and practical evidence of something closer to egalitarianism. Is something similar occurring regarding women and men's involvement in public congregational settings?

Largely, it is not. Evidence from Stoneleigh Bible Week, one of NFI's key public events, reveals strong practical conformity to the male church authority discourse (enforced, quite possibly, by the Jezebel discourse), small manifestations of women's 'special' role and a much weaker expression of the 'releasing women' discourse. I visited Stoneleigh for a day in 2000 and in 2001 spent a week camping there with three women from Westside. Of NFI's three conservative gender discourses, the male church authority discourse was outworked clearly there; the 'role of women' and the 'Spirit of Jezebel' discourses were far less visible. The emphasis I call feminist – releasing women to use their gifts – was barely apparent due to men's public dominance.

The main Stoneleigh gatherings were the daily morning and evening meetings. Adults and a few children (most were occupied in children's and youth programmes) crowded into rows facing a large upraised platform in the six-thousand-seat auditorium. The clearest gender demarcation at these meetings was that only men, key leaders often with apostolic roles, took the preaching slots. Spatial gender differences were visible. Half of the platform was occupied by musicians who led the congregation in half an hour or so of 'worship' (singing, sometimes accompanied by praying and prophesying). On the other half were

several rows of chairs. Half a dozen key male leaders occupied the front row, rendering NFI's 'male front' literal as well as symbolic. Their wives and less major male leaders sat on the row behind, perhaps signifying their secondary role.

Gender segregation and women's marginalisation were least evident during the 'worship time'. However, slightly more of the musicians were male. Female musicians were generally backing singers while men more often played instruments like bass guitar, drums, keyboard and saxophone. At each main meeting one musician stood at the front, acting as 'worship leader.' In most of the sessions the worship leader was a woman, Kate Simmonds, who is known in NFI as someone who has 'broken the mould' of traditional NFI women's roles, and whose role as 'one of the leading worship leaders in the country' Terry Virgo emphasised to counter the charge of the *Christianity and Renewal* interviewer (Fisher 2003) that 'New Frontiers does not encourage women'.

In addition to plentiful male language for God (terms like 'Father', 'King' and 'Lord' abound in NFI), several songs contained gender-exclusive terms describing Christians as God's 'sons.' This practice sometimes occurred in prayers, prophecies and sermons, although the inclusive 'sons and daughters of God' regularly featured. Prophecy occurred in nearly all meetings. Not only do men control prophecy in public settings, in that prophecies must generally be shared initially with a male leader who grants or refuses the prophesier permission to relay it to the congregation, but they also give almost all public prophecies. Of the twenty-one recorded prophecies[143] at the main gatherings in 2000, a woman gave only one. In 2001, men gave twenty-seven, women six.

Additional incidents at these meetings highlighted men's dominance. One evening a video advertising NFI's theological and leadership training programmes was shown on which two dozen male students and teachers gave spoken endorsements. Only two women spoke, one a youth worker in her twenties, saying: 'At the beginning [of the course] I thought "oh, there's all these scary blokes and then there's me."' The audience in the auditorium laughed at this, and I, who had found this woman intelligent and articulate when I interviewed her a year earlier, was struck by her portrayal as a infantilised figure given only a 'comic' role in a video in which men made all 'serious' endorsements. The laughter, encouraged by the

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[143] These prophecies were recorded on sound equipment, transcribed, photocopied and sent after the event to those who requested copies.

editing process, also demonstrated a lack of acknowledgement that this woman found this male-dominated leadership programme a difficult environment to function within.

Women and men did not only work together in the music group. To make the point that God wanted all nations to know him, Terry and Wendy Virgo took it in turns to read aloud over violin music the names of every country in the world. Books recommended by speakers (sixteen out of the nineteen advertised in the Stoneleigh 2001 handbook had male authors) included Wendy Virgo's (2001) meditation on the life of Sarah, Abraham's wife, yet Terry Virgo's recommendation ('the study guide at the end would be very useful for groups of ladies to work through because I know some ladies get together during the day') suggested that the book was suitable primarily for women, particularly those not in paid daytime employment; it also betrayed an assumption that women would not or should not be in paid daytime employment and suggested that the prohibition against women teaching men extends implicitly to women writing Bible study materials that might be used by men.

Of speakers featured in the Stoneleigh 2001 brochure, fifteen out of eighteen were men; female speakers were married to prominent leaders. Only seven of the fifty smaller adult seminars at Stoneleigh 2001 used female leaders. Children's work, a significant area since children accounted for a third to a half of those attending Stoneleigh,[144] incorporated greater female involvement. Ten age-specific activity groups were run. Women led the younger children's groups, with a roughly even male/female balance in leadership for children aged between five and ten. The activities for children and teenagers aged ten and above were led by men. While a greater proportion of women led seminars in the teenage slot 'Revive' (aimed at 14-19s) than in the adult sector, women still led only four of eighteen seminars.

The exceptional women who publicly prophesied, prayed, led worship and led the women's seminar (W. Virgo et al. 2001) were almost all married to key NFI leaders. This demonstrates that it is nearly impossible for 'ordinary' and single women to achieve public positions in NFI; using Brasher's (1998: 74-75) distinction between 'achieved' and 'ascribed' female church authority, these women possess ascribed authority because they are married to leaders.

The pastor's/minister's/vicar's/leader's wife has always been an important figure in Protestantism, particularly from the nineteenth century (Sweet 1983; Tucker 1988a; Morey

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[144] According to figures announced during the last evening meeting.

1991). Portrayed as ideal women, given greater public roles and authority than other women (as preachers, writers and unofficial leaders-of-women), leaders' wives are arguably the most empowered and exalted of Protestant women (Bailey 2001). But their burden is often great. As exemplars of womanhood much is required of them. They are expected to take the greater part in bringing up their children, enduring their husbands' frequent absences on church business and lack of involvement in domestic tasks. Their physical health often suffers. They have to manage their households on their husbands' low salaries. Their heavy, unpaid workload of church, caring and domestic work has prevented them from taking paid employment, as has the notion that doing paid work would be improper.

Their thorny, public position has generated opportunities and content for written explorations of their lives. Ann-Janine Morey (1991) documents the history of literary 'lamentations' by ministers' wives, a tradition flourishing in evangelicalism today (recent British examples include Urquhart 1983, Hansford 1998 and Tinker 2002). Often in self-help genre, these texts explore the difficulties surrounding the expectation that the leader's wife should be a 'super-saint' (Hansford 1998), offering practical, sometimes humorous, advice.

In 1985 Wendy Virgo published such a book. *Leading Ladies: Old Testament Principles for Leaders' Wives Today* (W. Virgo 1994) teaches leaders' wives the importance of submitting to their husbands. Her husband's words in the foreword are pertinent: 'Wendy has sought to display the biblical picture of a woman not crushed into mindless submission but released into fulfilling ministry through honest observance of the biblical safeguards' (W. Virgo 1994: 9). Submission has brought Wendy Virgo great public opportunities. When she renounced her feminist 'Jezebellic' views and re-submitted herself to male authority she gained more public opportunities to speak and write. 'The amazing thing is Terry gives me far more scope because he can trust me,' she explains. 'You see, for a couple of years he couldn't give me any scope at all because he didn't know what I was going to say. I was subversive [laughs]. I was shut down. But now, bless his heart, he promotes me. I don't particularly want that, but he gives me opportunity because he knows he can trust me' (W. Virgo 1998).

Leaders wives' church experiences are an exaggerated version of other evangelical women's. In NFI they model both strands of the postfeminist tension: they are arguably the most conservative and the most feminist. They advocate headship and submission vociferously, but also gain the most empowerment through speaking and writing publicly and

acting as role models for women. As observers of American New Christian Right spokeswomen have commented (Diamond 1989: 104-110; Faludi 1992: 259-289), they represent an extreme contradiction; the New Right women Faludi (1992: 288-289) met 'were voicing anti-feminist views while internalizing the message of the women's movement and quietly incorporating its tenets of self-determination, equality and freedom of choice into their private behaviour'. For a movement like NFI where it is difficult for women to achieve authority, they are also particularly important. But while they are exalted, embodied supremely in NFI in the figure of Wendy Virgo, they are also unique – like the Virgin Mary in Roman Catholicism (Warner 1976), few women (and surely not they themselves) can live up to their idealised image.

Juxtaposed with the fact that female Stoneleigh delegates outnumbered male ones and women outnumber men in NFI membership by an approximate ratio of 57:43,[145] women's marginalisation in public ministry is severe. The few women who have attained full-time paid employment for NFI despite not being leaders' wives are involved in missionary or social care work or as support staff and youth workers.[146] These positions primarily replicate conservative notions of women as maternal and supportive. Just as Victorian single women were teachers, philanthropists and surrogate wives for widowed fathers (Watkins 1984; Jalland 1986: 253-289), single female church workers become spiritual wives, mothers and carers. Philippa Stroud is a notable example. Now a leader's wife, she began before marrying to implement, with the support of local NFI churches, her vision to establish hostels for the homeless in her town; her 1999 book *God's Heart for the Poor* tells the story. Single women's leadership of the homeless hostels can be seen as evidence that traditional, purely supportive, femininity is eroding. However, some in NFI view the dominance of single women as hostel managers as problematic when women manage hostels for male residents (Stroud 1999: 159, 190). In recent years men have taken over leadership of some hostels. So while women may be a little more involved in paid NFI work than previously, such work is

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[145] This is my observation. I requested figures from NFI revealing the gender breakdown of Stoneleigh attendance, but was told they were unavailable. My counts at NFI church services revealed a female:male ratio of between about 52:48 and 65:35. This was roughly confirmed by twelve churches (from twenty I contacted randomly selected from the list on NFI's website) who on my request supplied figures indicating the gender ratio of adults on their membership/attendance lists. These churches showed an average 57:43 ratio. This contrasts with a British church average of between 61:39 and 65:35. It is almost certain that women outnumbered men at Stoneleigh.

[146] They are generally young and single, perhaps indicating that such positions have recently emerged or that women give up work upon marriage

gendered and positions them as subordinate. They have entered what Walby calls 'public patriarchy' (see Chapter 5); following Adkins' (2000) argument (see Chapter 3) the slightly expanded NFI labour market is an arena for the re-traditionalisation of gender.

Looking around during the main Stoneleigh meetings, I noted that the children present were attended to more by women than men; a count suggested that nine out of ten people holding children were female. It was not uncommon to see a man singing gustily, his hands outstretched to God, while his wife soothed a young child. Moreover, young people's activities replicated the gendering of adult meetings and seminars. In the campsite's games areas I watched groups of young men playing football, taking up large areas of grass and shouting to each other, while young women clustered at one side, watching the boys and talking among themselves.[147]

NFI literature constitutes another public space. Analysis of thirteen issues of *NFI Magazine* between 1998 and 2002 reveals that articles by men appeared five times more frequently as articles by women. The magazine's focus on providing biblical teaching and NFI's reluctance to allow women to contribute this may explain this. Women's accounts of conversion or healing are sometimes included, but the only female writer whose articles include biblical instruction was Wendy Virgo, whose status as Terry's wife provides these writing opportunities. The *NFI Magazine* cover photograph was two to three times more likely to be of a man than a woman. As I will argue in the next chapter with reference to men appropriating traditionally feminine church roles, men's appropriation of the conventionally (in mainstream magazines) feminine cover photo, while it can be read as an acceptance of feminist criticism of the media emphasis on female attractiveness, may also signify reduction in the overall public opportunities available to women, as men now dominate in previously female areas.

Conclusions

This chapter has shown NFI's strong ideological adherence to gender traditionalist notions of church participation. This is primarily discussed through a discourse applauding

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[147] Studies of the gendered nature of youth work make similar observations (Sawbridge & Spence 1991). The construction of gender in evangelical churches' youth and children's activities is a fruitful area for future enquiry.

male church authority and denigrating women's desires for authority as rebellious or 'Jezebellic'. NFI also articulate, infrequently, a gender-differentiating discourse of women's unique role in church.

These understandings are applied with relative consistency in NFI's major public settings, where conservative ideology is put into practice, not moderated. Observation at Stoneleigh Bible Week demonstrated men's almost complete dominance in preaching, seminar leading and prophecy. Men generally author NFI's printed literature. Areas in which women are more publicly involved are music and social care work. However, not only are these women's activities sometimes the focus of disquiet from those worried about the propriety of women's leadership, but women's leadership is additionally constructed along traditional lines of femininity (female singers are attractive, women working with vulnerable people are motherly caregivers). Marriage operates as an implicit precondition for female prominence, and a very few wives of leaders attain influence as speakers, writers and role models.

This is not to say that NFI has been untouched by feminism. Feminist language of 'release' and 'liberation' has been integrated into a positive discourse of female church involvement. Wendy Virgo's 'Jezebel' sermon reveals that evangelical feminism has challenged NFI. Yet Virgo's rejection of this feminism has been the occasion for a backlash reassertion of male authority. NFI's public, congregational discourses and practices of gender are postfeminist, yet with a far stronger emphasis on separate spheres conservatism and its backlash reassertion.

Chapter 5

Gender in a Local NFI Congregation: the Case of Westside

Introduction

While NFI's public ideologies and practices of gender in church life are mainly conservative, local churches may not be bound to this pattern. While, as the last chapter showed, Steve Blaber's response to my enquiry about whether a church with female elders could affiliate to NFI indicated that the freedom of local churches to deviate from NFI's ideological positions is restricted, local congregations' spatial independence may allow some liberty. This chapter discusses the negotiation of gender in local church life through close study of Westside, beginning with data gained from interviews with twenty Westside members and progressing to data gained through participant observation.

Interview responses

Westside members' views on women in church leadership were diverse. Moreover, other than the egalitarian tendency of the single women (see Chapter 8), attitudes demonstrated no obvious gender division. In response to the question 'Do you think men and women should have different roles in the church? (if yes, what should the differences be?)', six out of the twenty answered in the negative, adding that 'who does what' should depend on individual abilities, or, as Jenny put it, 'individual preference and appropriateness'. 'If God really loved us all equally he would want us all to succeed and do his work and sometimes a woman's better, sometimes a man's better', said Imogen. Karen grew up attending evangelical churches and observed gendered role differentiation that troubled her. Discovering shortly before the interview that Westside would exclude women when it officially appointed elders, she found this problematic:

> I don't think [men and women] have to [have different roles] because, but I think they do. Like I know in all the churches, like, I grew up in when I was younger, it was very much the men were all the elders and the leaders, the men would go off and do their discussions and the women would be on the flower rota and make the coffee. And I think that's wrong because I think a lot of women have ended up feeling quite suppressed and, like, useless probably…I mean my mum doesn't ever, she sort of does the Sunday school bit of things and you know, I don't know, not that she necessarily wants to do all the other stuff, but I think some women probably are capable and probably feel a bit like why can't they do that?…I only found out recently about Westside not having women elders and I'm not sure about that. Apparently there's something in the Bible about it, where they get the idea from, but I don't know, it's something I'm not – I just think that God can give the gift to anyone to do those things in a church situation, so I'm not sure about that one.

Six were undecided; four of these leaned towards the view that women could take any role apart from eldership. Simon admitted:

> I'm always torn on this by, by what I think I see in the Bible and what I know experientially from life…I think that there, there, there are women in the church who are every bit as capable of doing, you know, doing everything that fellas do in church… But you know I just think, I think biblically, um in stuff like Paul's letters, why, you know, why are there so few women represented in Acts? Why did Jesus not call women to leadership roles initially when he was calling the disciples?…There does seem to be that sort of principle of, you know, men being chosen as primary leaders and as a sort of, er, um, to have a kind of, not authority, I can't think of the right word, I don't really like it, but, you know, to have more of a sort of headship role in a church. But if I'm being really honest I don't, I don't fully understand it in the context of the women that I know and hang out with, that I see are, you know, very, very capable and very up to the job.

A further eight believed men and women should have different roles: five said that this meant that women could take any position apart from eldership. However, most articulated this with considerable circumvention, clarification and hesitancy. Jane took this line, but, as evangelical feminists argue to their advantage, she recognised it was a complex issue which hinged on how certain words were interpreted:

> It all boils down to this one issue as far as I can make out from the Bible, as what it means when it says that a woman shouldn't teach or have authority over a man. So a woman can do everything as far as I can make out, and every ministry is open to her except for the one where that would put her in direct government of a church situation or authority over men, which in our type of church set-up is eldership. When it comes

> to teaching, I'll be honest with you, I don't know how I interpret the word 'teach' because I'm, no one seems to have a problem with me sitting and doing a Bible study to my small group and we call that 'church' because...we're enacting church when we all meet together in a small group and I'm allowed to do a Bible study, so I'm teaching, but, but there would be a lot of people in New Frontiers churches who would be uncomfortable if that were to become the official preach on a Sunday morning to a gathering. So I think I'm hazy on it. I don't think Mark's sure about it either and I think New Frontiers is generally hazy on that issue and Mark and I have pushed a few buttons and the answers have been 'don't know.' So there you go, don't know. And I've read a few books on the role of women and you can get round it, you can get round the word 'teach' by saying you know, this that and the other, but I think it's just not clear enough for me to be dogmatically comfortable with anything.

Her husband Mark erred towards restricting preaching and eldership to men but has not 'done the work to figure out my position more clearly.' NFI's stance is not as clearly articulated as he would like, and he considers it important that the issue be investigated, so that 'we should have...the ability to clearly say "actually, I agree with this stream of evangelical thought because I've looked at their arguments and they make sense to me."' Even the leader Chris appeared hesitant. While he believed only men should be elders, he advocated gender differentiation in a context of equality:

> We, we were talking earlier on and I think I admitted that I hadn't spent hours and days kind of looking into what I, grappling with Scripture in terms of what I feel the different roles is of men and women. Um, I think that um, my understanding is, is that, is that there are different roles. My understanding is that men and women are equal but that there is a difference in terms of their roles and I think, I think that their roles are pretty well, they could pretty well do the same things apart from where it came to um, say governmental position within the church, something like eldership or whatever which I understand to be male, a male thing um, but...my understanding is that pretty well anything else can be either a man or a woman, but I think seen, definitely seen in a context of men and women being equal, and I think that's something that's really important to me.

Two of the eight believed women could function in leadership as long as they were under a male leader's authority. Ann grew up in Brethrenism where women had to cover their heads and were forbidden from speaking during church meetings. On leaving the Brethren she experienced Restorationist churches as more liberating to women, but still thought women should submit to male authority:

> When we were in the Brethren the women did nothing except make the tea, you know, and weren't allowed to speak, um, had to wear hats.
> *KA: So they couldn't speak even though they had hats?*
> No, no, not in the meeting. They could teach Sunday school but they couldn't teach men. They weren't allowed to teach men. They could do a women's meeting but they couldn't teach men, so I mean we didn't agree with that. We felt in fact when we were new Christians we went to a Brethren prayer meeting and, um there were, there was either two or three men I think in this meeting and the rest were ladies. Well, the ladies weren't allowed to pray. Well, I didn't know that and I went and prayed. [Laughs]
> *KA: Did they tell you off?*
> Yes, at the end. Discreetly at the end they said 'ladies don't pray in the prayer meeting'. I thought 'well why do the ladies bother going to the prayer meeting?' So that was um, you know, that was our sort of church upbringing, you know, that ladies didn't do anything. Um, I think it's good now that women take a much bigger role in the church, um, but I, I still think that women have to, like a wife has to have her husband as her covering, and I still think that in the church, that the women have to, you know, be sort of in submission to, um, to the male headship because I believe that's the way that God has said, you know that Christ is the head of the church and the male's the head of the female.

One, Marion, believed that women could take any role apart from being an elder and preach 'as long as it wasn't in terms of vision for the future'; in other words, as long as their preaching endorsed rather than set the church's mission.

The majority favoured some gender differentiation, and there was reasonable unity around women's necessary exclusion from eldership. As the previous chapter showed, NFI's gender differentiation in ministry operates through three concepts: male church authority, rejection of the 'spirit of Jezebel' and women's different role. But Westside's arguments for gender differentiation revolve almost entirely around male authority. Although, like Chris (above), they speak about men and women's different, complementary roles, they never define a woman's role in any way other than saying that women should not be elders. In other words, they do not have a working concept of uniquely feminine church activities (they do not, for example, suggest that women are better at teaching children). Additionally, no one appropriated the Jezebel discourse to argue against women taking leading roles. Westside members have fewer arguments in favour of women's exclusion from eldership than NFI leaders. They articulate them less dogmatically and appear less convinced by them. Indeed some people abide by a non-egalitarian viewpoint because they believe it 'biblical' despite their feelings and experiences to the contrary. Furthermore, the hesitancy expressed by many with conservative views is noteworthy because it demonstrates awkwardness at holding

attitudes they consider are not socially acceptable. The explicitly egalitarian third (five single women and one married man) constituted a surprisingly high proportion, given the strength of NFI's ideological statements about church roles.

Two women mentioned Wendy Virgo's Jezebel seminar, expressing caution about accepting it. Jane told me about the seminar before I had heard of it. She explained:

> a Jezebellic spirit (which is a very trendy thing everyone's talking about at the moment)…I think basically means um the, the um desire in a woman to usurp male authority or her husband's authority, as in the Jezebel-Ahab situation… It means this spirit of a woman trying to usurp the authority of a man.

If the 'Jezebellic spirit' became a 'very trendy thing' in NFI, this demonstrates the influence of Wendy Virgo's talk. Jane's definition of the spirit as something women suffer from demonstrates that Virgo's audience understood her to be describing and condemning only *women's* assertion. Jane's response was ambivalent. She found it 'quite powerful' and considered Wendy Virgo's willingness to give it 'very humble.' Yet she blamed the Jezebel discourse for the problem NFI women face gaining the right to preach: leaders invite male members of the congregation to, but do not ask their suitably educated wives.

> Like the feminist move, there's a whole, there's a long way to go and it's probably up to us to with all grace and humility go for it, do you know what I mean? [laughs] But it's really hard to, to go for it as a woman because all the time you're treading on eggshells thinking 'they're going to point their finger at me and say "wrong motivation, she's blowing her own trumpet, beat her down, Jezebel" or something like that'.

The Jezebel sermon made Alison 'really angry.' She considered it damaging because it prevented women challenging their marginalisation. She told me how difficult she found accepting NFI's view that only men should be elders. 'Maybe', she laughed, 'I've got a spirit of rebellion,' continuing haltingly:

> Maybe there is an issue, you know, maybe, well I think there probably is, you know, because normally when you find, um, like, these minority groups, although women isn't really a minority group, but do you know what I mean, a group that has been oppressed previously, you do end up with an issue in yourself that you do need to deal with and I would say I probably do have a bit of an issue in myself, you know that I can be like, you know, like guys my own age that do have a leadership role I find really difficult, um, and so I think in that respect I do have an issue in myself,

> um, but I think by, by labelling it as a spirit it makes it a problem in that you can't actually broach it, you can't say 'but maybe there's also a problem that maybe this is wrong.'

In accepting she may have an 'issue' to resolve about feeling resentful when her male peers are given greater leadership opportunities than her she takes an approach common in individualized late modernity which sees problems – in this case women's oppression – as individual rather than structural or communal; contemporary patriarchal capitalism 'personalize[s] social sin' (Fulkerson 1994: 10). Influenced by this Alison not only advocates individual rather than collective solutions – it is up to her to resolve 'her' 'issue' – she also appears to see her anger as wrong. Lucy Tatman (1996) highlights Christianity's tendency to dismiss women's anger as madness or sin rather than energy to be harnessed in the necessary fight for justice. However, Alison recognises and implicitly criticises the fact that the Jezebel discourse prevents even an individualized challenge to women's exclusion from eldership: 'you can't say "but maybe there's also a problem that maybe this is wrong."'

Participant observation

The postfeminist tension between support and rejection of congregational gender equality demonstrated in the interviews was visible in the meetings I attended. My presence provoked discussions about 'women's roles' and stories about past churches. Some Westsiders had attended Restorationist churches for many years and talked about the changes that had occurred. One of these concerned the gradual disappearance of the practice, based on a literal reading of 1 Corinthians 11:4-15, requiring women to cover their heads when praying or giving prophecies in public to symbolise being under male authority or 'covering' (Aune 1998: 48-49; Franks 2001: 145-157). Jane recalled the Restorationist church she belonged to in the 1980s introducing headcovering. Being (she said) 'a bit rebellious', she responded to the leader's announcement by wearing a (more conventionally masculine) cap rather than a headscarf when she sung in the church music group. Emma, who used to belong to a large church from the Restorationist network Covenant Ministries, supported its headcovering practices. When she first joined an NFI church that had dispensed with headcovering, she condemned NFI for abandoning it. She now endorses NFI's view that

headcovering is unnecessary as long as a submissive attitude to husband and church leaders is present (W. Virgo 1989: 129), and mocks her earlier view:

> 'I remember when I came to [NFI church] and a woman prophesied without her head covered I bowed my head and prayed "Lord, please forgive her" [everyone laughs]. [The Covenant Ministries church] had a big tub of headscarves and hats they used to hand round.'

Similarly, Ann told the group about the time Harry and she (bareheaded) walked into a Brethren church they had not been to before. The steward at the door told her to put a hat on, which upset her, partly because she did not have one with her. These three accounts of past church headcovering practices are narrated from an implied position of superior understanding. Jane, Emma and Ann now consider headcovering unnecessary and their past practices backward and unliberated in comparison with NFI's greater enlightenment regarding women.

Other than when asked in the interviews, nobody in Westside expressed during the meetings or in social interaction a non-egalitarian view of women's church participation. On several occasions people openly supported gender equality. After my third meeting I discussed my research with Emma, who explained: 'You'll find in our group everything's equal. Men don't dominate.' I agreed, having thus far gained that impression. She continued 'Chris is the leader, but you wouldn't know that.' Chris echoed her anxiety to assert Westside's egalitarianism as the group were drinking tea before the meeting several weeks later. After asking whether I wrote down what happened at their meetings when I got home (I said I did), Chris said: 'we should have some kind of equal opportunities survey.' He continued, and others joined in:

> Chris: 'You get four points if a woman anchors[148], three if she's a worship leader. What about playing the piano?'
> Jane: 'One or two, because I just follow [the worship leader's] signals.'
> Discussion follows about the relative importance of anchoring and worship leading.

The conversation turned to how to distinguish between teaching and preaching. Jane explained the view generally held in NFI that women may teach (explain what a Bible

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[148] Leads a meeting.

passage says) but not preach (a 'more dynamic and directive "you must do this"'), and quoted 1 Timothy 2:12. She mentioned that an NFI pastor she knew said he would be happy to let a woman preach, but did not think he knew any women capable. Jenny interjected 'How will he know if they never try?' Chris made no direct comment, but added that he tended to 'go on gut, on what God's saying' when assigning congregational responsibilities.

Chris as leader

Chris embodied a tension between wanting to 'release' women and adhering to gender-based restrictions he saw in the Bible and heard from his NFI overseers. Chris believes women are capable of taking on leadership roles. He gave prophecies on different occasions to Ruth and Imogen that God was calling them to leadership. The first time I met Chris, he contrasted NFI with the New Church network I said I wanted to compare them with by saying 'Pioneer are much more releasing of women than New Frontiers'. Rather like Terry Virgo's linking of female involvement and fulfilment in the *Christianity and Renewal* interview (discussed in the last chapter), Chris evidently considers that women are not entirely free in NFI, and that 'released' women are those able to be involved at all congregational levels. 'Release' also means, he explained during interview, 'help[ing] [people] fulfil the call of God on their lives'; this should be discerned not only through the Bible but also as he hears God through prophecy and other leaders' advice. Keeping that tension – ensuring a level of release for women, obeying the Bible and listening to his NFI overseers – is not easy, he explained:

> One of the key issues for me is how I involve women in decision making and that kind of thing and in leadership of the church without sort of, and getting things right in terms of, at the moment my stance is women shouldn't be in kind of governmental position, um, er, so how, getting that right. I mean one of the issues for us is, will be, whether people in New Frontiers feel like we're going over the mark a bit, or a bit near the line in terms of the way we are. That could be an issue as we grow.
> *KA: How does that work? Do they have rules? Say, for example, you were to appoint a woman elder, what would happen? Would you have to resign from New Frontiers?*
> I would imagine, my understanding of the New Frontiers line is that…they're happy with women being, being anything apart from governmental-type positions. So at the end of the day if you, if you didn't agree with that then I think you, it's probably an important enough issue for you to say, well, 'actually we have, we haven't got the same kind of values', so it may be at that point that you'd have to consider, consider

> whether you could stay in New Frontiers. But at the end of the day, you know, everyone, every individual needs to not just toe the party line but to grapple with Scripture and find out things for themselves.

As long as Chris wants Westside to stay in NFI, he may not be at liberty to allow gender equality. Westside may, in some ways, appear to be a patriarchy, but it is but one part in a larger, more powerful, patriarchal organisation within which even male elders sometimes lack power.

Mark's paper on the role of women

As Westside prepared to begin Sunday services, women's involvement there became an issue. Chris asked Mark, who is regarded as having good biblical knowledge, to prepare a draft paper on the role of women. Mark's paper reveals conflict between traditional and feminist stances. It begins: 'Perhaps the most contentious issue in contemporary evangelical Christianity is that of the role of women in the church.' It continues: 'We are keen that Westside should not fall into the trap of sweeping this issue under the carpet…we would prefer that whatever position we reach, we reach by honest prayer and rational study rather than by default.' The paper judges the issue important for three reasons: 1) church leaders are answerable to God for how they develop those they lead; 2) people visiting Westside could be put off if they perceive male domination; 3) if women have Bible-teaching abilities they are forbidden to use, these women and the whole congregation will be unable to benefit. Mark weighs up what he sees as the central conflict:

> Living in Western Europe in the 21st century, it is absolutely contrary to our intuition that there may be some roles from which women are excluded simply on the basis of their gender. Yet there are passages in the New Testament which seem on the surface to say just that.

He finds that although the three reasons above are good arguments for removing restrictions in women's roles, the deciding factor must be 'the teaching of the Bible.' The (postfeminist) conflict is evident. The feminist support for women's access to leading roles that has filtered down through public channels and become the unofficial 'common sense' of visitors to NFI

and, partly, of Mark himself jostles with the tie to a perceived biblical tradition limiting women's ministerial opportunities.

Attitudes and practices of 'gifts'

NFI consider deploying one's talents in the service of God's 'kingdom' a mandate for all believers. As I argued concerning the 'releasing women' discourse, stressing each person's responsibility to use their gifts minimises gender prohibitions around leadership. Westside's constructions of 'gift' draw on separate spheres and backlash evangelicalism's belief in a connection between church-related gifts and gender (men were suited to leadership, women to supportive roles) and on Christian feminist challenges to this.

A 'Spiritual Gift Assessment' Westside undertook highlighted this. The house group were given questionnaires containing over a hundred statements, such as 'I like to organise people, tasks and events' and 'I am able to communicate God's word effectively.' Everyone had to rate their agreement or disagreement with each statement and fill in a grid to see which three of twenty gifts (e.g. administration, creative communication, encouragement etc.) they scored highest on. The questionnaire did not ask about gender. Yet Westside's interpretation of it demonstrates that the gifts individuals apparently possessed, and their ability to exercise them, were sometimes gendered.

Two months later Simon produced a grid listing everyone's top three gifts. The only two people the exercise showed as having leadership gifts were men. Men were also more likely to have the gift of prophecy. Only women possessed the gifts of mercy, creative communication and administration. However, gifts that are traditionally stereotyped as feminine such as hospitality were possessed by both men and women, as were gifts stereotyped as masculine, such as teaching. Most gifts were held by at least one person of each gender.

These talents, called 'gifts' because they are regarded as abilities God bestows upon an individual, sometimes through making supernatural an already-existing 'natural' ability, are a means of making gender and 'naturalizing' (Scott 1986: 1069) an ongoing cultural and personal history of gender construction. Socially constructed abilities are rendered natural and of divine origin. When such exercises are based on current and previous experience they will likely indicate greater male suitability to leadership. Since 'gifts' generally emerge when

individuals have opportunities to develop particular abilities, a woman who has not had opportunities to lead would probably not be revealed in such an exercise as a leader.

Gender also influenced whether and how far these gifts were exercised. Simon handed out the house group's timetable for the next months. He had written the initials of those who had been shown in the gifts exercise to have teaching gifts and indicated that they would be asked to lead Bible studies and give talks. Two additional men's names were on this list: the father of one member of Westside who is an elder in another NFI church, and Harry, the older middle-aged husband of Ann. Simon then referred to the grid listing everyone's top three gifts and asked us to tell the group how we were using, and planning to use, those gifts. Nobody voiced the issue that women whose sheets indicated public gifts such as teaching or, as Ruth's did, mission/apostleship, may be constrained from using them by prohibitions against women in eldership and a general lack of encouragement of women performing leadership functions. Neither did anyone acknowledge that ability to exercise one's gifts might be affected by the degree to which such gifts were considered gender-appropriate.

When Tom's turn came to speak he explained that his gifts were faith, intercession (prayer for others' needs) and encouragement, adding, though, that they did not excite him. Instead, his excitement came from wanting 'to tell the whole world about Jesus and helping them, like gathering up the sheep.' 'That sounds like leadership or apostleship,' Simon commented, and when Tom admitted that he did not know what apostleship was, Harry explained 'It's church building.' Simon elaborated: 'It's what Paul did: evangelising, encouraging Christians, starting churches.'

While Ruth's revealed 'apostolic' gifts were passed over Tom's gender probably explains Simon's eagerness to encourage Tom in leadership abilities that the gifts exercise did not reveal. About a year after I left Westside someone I kept in touch with told me that Tom had been given preaching opportunities at Sunday services. Several months later, Tom had been added to the leadership team (joining Chris, Mark and Simon). Given Tom's gift assessment (mentioning neither teaching nor leadership), young age, short experience of being a Christian and limited Bible knowledge (evident during his interview), the fact that he was encouraged and enabled to lead and preach suggests that his ascribed status as male must have been the crucial factor in his 'elevation'.

Harry's assessment also revealed a gift – hospitality – which is historically considered feminine. In a later house group he explained 'I'm not great at conversation; I've led Bible studies and taught but that's not what I'm really good at; I'm good at listening and making people feel welcome.' Yet rather than encourage his hospitality, Westsiders encouraged him to teach. Furthermore, he was considered an authority on spiritual matters. During a Bible study on the Holy Spirit led by Rachel Dawn asked what 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' was. Simon asked Harry to explain, calling him a 'scholar'. Though Harry's Bible knowledge may have been good, the label 'scholar' was inappropriate. Harry's level of formal education was limited. Yet, like Tom, his gender became more important in the allocation of leadership roles: because he was a man, he was given perhaps more opportunities than appropriate to teach and lead.

The statistics I constructed from my observations detailing who did what at group meetings demonstrate far greater male involvement, not only in leadership but also, surprisingly, in conventionally feminine roles. Each meeting generally contained two or three leadership opportunities: leading ('anchoring') a meeting, giving a talk or Bible study, or leading the singing ('leading worship'). Of 43 meetings I attended, men took 57% of leadership opportunities (anchoring 60% of meetings, giving 52% of talks and leading 62% of worship sessions). They also made tea before the meeting 57% of the time. However, these figures showing greater, but not overwhelmingly greater, male involvement are obscured by the fact that, over all the meetings, male attendance stood at only 28%. At a total of 43 meetings, 315 of the 436 present were women, while 121 were men: in other words, at a typical meeting, ten people were present, of whom almost three were men. The huge gender disparity in attendance needs to be placed against the predominance of men in leadership to produce figures that reveal, in proportion to their number, how likely men and women were to take leadership roles. When this is done, a startling difference in levels of male and female leadership becomes evident. Proportionate to their attendance, men were 3.4 times more likely to perform a leadership function than women.

Why men make tea

Men were also – the identical figure is striking – 3.4 times more likely than women to make tea. Men's dominance in tea making signifies at one level the erosion of the separate

spheres equation of women with domesticity and the influence of feminist calls for male participation in domestic tasks. At another level it reveals, like the interviews, that Westside's gender-differentiation centred not on women's different role or tendency to be Jezebellic, but on male authority and leadership. Male leadership is considered so important to render it necessary that men predominate in all church activities, including those traditionally reserved for women. As the principle of male leadership is enacted through men's dominance in anchoring, teaching, leading Bible studies, leading worship and making tea, any uniquely 'feminine' role women may have possessed within separate spheres patterns disappears. Women are no longer seen as possessing unique feminine talents. This loss of a female sphere represents a diminishment of women's power, for there is now no sphere over which women possess primary authority.

What is occurring echoes Walby's (1990: 19-24, 173-201) thesis that western postindustrial societies have transformed from private to public patriarchies. Walby argues that patriarchy, which she defines as 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women' (1990: 20), used to be private. Women were excluded from the public sphere, notably in nineteenth-century England. 'Patriarchal relations of production' in the household, in which husbands exploit their wives' unpaid labour, was the primary site of women's subordination within private patriarchy. Contemporary Britain has seen patriarchy become public. The household is no longer women's primary arena of subordination. Women are now admitted to the public sphere but are segregated into lower-paid jobs and subordinate to men. Employment and the state have become the prime patriarchal arenas.

I recognise that nineteenth-century 'private patriarchy' allowed women a unique place to exercise authority (for example, as nurturers and household managers). I also recognise that Westside women remain ideologically excluded from the highest levels of leadership. Yet I suggest that Westside women's greater access to leadership roles, in comparison with more conservative churches, signifies movement towards a kind of public patriarchy (insofar as the church can be considered public). They have a potentially larger scope, but now wherever they function – including areas like tea making that used to be regarded as 'women's roles' – they experience male dominance. 'No longer restricted to the domestic hearth', women 'have the whole society in which to roam and be exploited' (Walby 1990: 201).

Feminist challenges: the case of Jenny

Postfeminism fuses 'public' patriarchy in church roles with feminist attitudes and resistance to women's congregational marginalisation. Jenny, a divorced middle-aged woman, embodied the feminist challenge to Westside. The leaders' disapproval of her led to her increased marginalisation, revealing the strength of Westside's ideological barriers against women's leadership. Jenny regularly told me of her frustration that NFI and Westside prohibited women from being elders. Moreover, she considered single and middle-aged women particularly excluded. When I asked why she did not leave and attend an egalitarian church she answered, 'Maybe I will.'

In conversations with me several Westside members questioned why Jenny was not on the mixed-gender wider leadership team that existed during about the first year of my research. She had come to the city shortly after Chris and Sarah to start the church. Until Harry and Ann arrived she was the oldest member of Westside by some twenty years and had been a Christian for some time. Jenny told me she felt 'older single women are invisible' in the New Churches. Other NFI churches she had attended ignored her, and she felt 'marginalised.' A conversation with Jenny concerning the publication of my own book on single women's place in evangelicalism (Aune 2002) exposed these concerns:

> 'What's your main argument?'
> *KA: 'That single women aren't treated very well and aren't given equal roles to married women.'*
> 'Middle-aged women are just used in supportive roles, although there's so many of them.'
> *KA: 'Like babysitting?'*
> 'Babysitting and cooking.'
> *KA: 'But in this group you're prayer director. That's a role.'*
> 'But it's patronising. It was done to patronise me. I told Chris that. It's because they don't want me to lead a group.'
> *KA: 'Because you're single?'*
> 'Because they only want couples and I'm a single middle-aged woman.'

Jenny's ambiguous position provided the greatest evidence that single and/or feminist women[149] were marginalised. Another time Jenny told me that Chris had said she could lead a house group endorsed by Westside as long she recruited attendees from outside Westside.[150] One evening, Chris announced that Simon and Rachel, a married couple, would take over leading a house group. Endorsing Simon and Rachel as sharing his values he added: 'when we've got some more strong Christian couples they can lead groups.' Objecting to Chris singling out married people as leaders, Simon said quietly, 'they don't have to be couples,' to which Jenny added, 'and they don't have to be young.' Chris challenged neither interpolation.

Jenny exemplifies not only single and feminist women's marginalisation but also their ability to reinterpret it temporarily to their advantage. Towards the end of my fieldwork I discussed with Jenny her absence from the core leadership team. She suggested that Westside leaders view her as 'too controversial' because she is outspoken and contradicts NFI orthodoxy.[151] She admitted to me she was unsure how long she would remain in the city and at Westside; she would 'rather be free and be myself than be on the core team and not be able to be myself.' Although a leadership position at Westside might enable her to exert influence, her loss of individuality would have been too great. While she had not transcended her marginal position, she understood it as a corollary of being middle-aged, female, single and considered heterodox.

This, however, was not the end of Jenny's story. What happened in the last two months of my fieldwork demonstrated that she and other single women could and did transform their marginality and attain new roles, albeit temporarily. Jenny related the events during a church meeting just before I left. One evening, she, Dawn and Lara (two other single women who lived nearby) met to pray for their local community. She explained: 'We prayed for [the area] and for the first time I felt really excited about God doing something in this area. I said to God, "I've got nothing; you'll have to do it."' Later that week she discovered some American missionaries delivering videos about Christianity along her street. They offered to introduce her to anyone they met who wanted to join a Bible study group.

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[149] Westside single women were likely to be feminist, and Westside feminist women were likely to be single (see Chapter 8).

[150] This is not the usual method of starting house groups. Normally, following 'cell church' ideology, when a growing group reaches 14-16 members it splits into two groups and an extra leader is appointed.

[151] For example, she finds it difficult to accept NFI's view that members of other religions will go to hell.

She joined them knocking on doors, and this resulted in several people expressing interest in a group. One woman worked for the Avon cosmetics company, and Jenny agreed to place an order on condition that she watch the video. The next day, the missionaries telephoned Jenny to say that 'the Avon lady' had 'given her life to the Lord' and wanted to join the Bible study group Jenny was establishing. Within three weeks, the new house group had begun, led by Jenny and helped by five of the single women without prior leadership roles at Westside. Significantly, those who joined this group were also single women, one with a young child.

Praying and evangelising enabled Jenny, Dawn and Lara to find new roles within a church reluctant to grant them the positions they desired. These strategies have historical and contemporary precedents.[152] Griffith (1997: 198) notes the power women of the Women's Aglow Fellowship believe they exercise as they pray together. She suggests that prayer serves a dual function: it is 'a means of articulating the pain and frustration felt in daily life' and 'a tool for solving crises'. Jenny's story manifests both. Telling God 'I've got nothing' she articulates her powerlessness, yet the act of prayer (then evangelism) enables her to transform her 'crisis' of marginality.[153]

Sarah, the 'leader's wife'

Like Wendy Virgo in NFI, Sarah, Chris' wife, possessed the highest status of Westside women – higher also than some of the men. Identified as 'everyone's spiritual mother' by someone during a social gathering, she was considered wise, mature and spiritually sensitive. Sarah embodied the tensions surrounding leaders' wives discussed in the previous chapter, namely their status as most empowered, yet most adamant advocates of women's submission. Another tension also existed between regarding the leader's wife as a leader herself, or as the wife of the leader. Depending upon their feminist sympathies, group

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[152] Single women's involvement in evangelism through overseas missionary work since the nineteenth century is well documented (Bendroth 1993: 88-89; Tucker 1988b: 130-35, 227-8, 232-5; Isherwood 1979; Kirkwood 1993; Swaisland 1993). Historically, while men embarking upon full-time Christian work often became church ministers, women have been limited to roles considered appropriately feminine; overseas missionary work has been one such role (Baillie 2002: 83-4). It may be that nineteenth-century single women entered positions as missionaries in such large numbers because they lacked opportunities in secular workplaces (Nixson 1997: 32-35).

[153] Her marginality was shortly restored, however. Perhaps regarding Jenny as threatening, Westside's leaders soon gave leadership of her women-only group to the older married couple, Harry and Ann, and a younger single woman.

members interpreted Sarah more or less as a leader in her own right. Those favouring women's leadership tended to act as if Sarah's leadership role in the church was equal to Chris'. For example, when Sarah and Chris suffered a problem at home, Simon interpreted it as a satanic attack: 'Chris and Sarah are getting it in the neck from the devil over leading the church,' he surmised, speaking as if Sarah and Chris were co-leaders. Similarly, when I visited Stoneleigh in 2000 with several Westside women the platform speaker instructed us to 'pray for your leaders'. Taking charge, Ruth instructed us: 'let's pray for Chris and Sarah.'

Sarah seemed conscious of her ambiguous role: while she possessed the most authority of all the women, she considered it muted in comparison with Chris'. One evening Harry addressed the question 'What does the church think of the [National] Lottery?' to Sarah (in Chris's absence), presumably regarding her as the most authoritative person present. Sarah replied: 'Chris thinks it's awful. I think God sometimes does things that offend us, but Chris would definitely say no.' She initially equated Chris' opinion with 'the church's', yet, perhaps recognising her (lesser) influence in shaping 'the church', added her opinion before reiterating Chris'.

Women may 'anchor' Westside group meetings. As anchors they have the right to overrule suggestions made by others, including their husbands, which Sarah sometimes did. This created intriguing interactions between her and Chris, who appeared confused about how to negotiate Sarah's temporary authority. Chris sometimes treated Sarah's leadership as amusing and once, addressing me, joked after he finished leading worship that 'Sarah told me to stop so I stopped because I'm a man under authority', foregrounding, yet simultaneously mocking, Sarah's leadership.

Although Westside's attitudes to leaders' wives were more egalitarian than those visible in large-scale NFI settings and public ideology, conservative attitudes were also expressed. One particular incident showed their desire to play down the influence of leaders' wives. At a meeting in January Chris outlined the vision and objectives for Westside that year which he, Mark and Simon, the three main leaders, had formulated. 'When we first got here there was only me as a leader,' Chris recalled. 'And Sarah', a woman interjected. 'Well', Chris faltered, 'Sarah kind of half,' at which point Sarah and the other women laughed. Sarah turned to me and, partially joking, said 'write this down, Kristin.'

When a married couple are called 'leaders' this carries unspoken gendered implications. Pete and Sally, the leading couple in another NFI church plant, visited Westside

one evening to describe what they had learned in the years since beginning their church plant. Pete did almost all the talking. When Sally eventually made a comment, she stopped mid-sentence and explained: 'Pete was going to say at the beginning that he was going to talk and I would interrupt from time to time, in case you thought I was being argy.' Sally's tentativeness surprised me, given that she and Pete (rather than just Pete) were introduced as having come to speak. What Sally is conforming to, I suggest, is an expectation learned in NFI that when 'they' is used to signify a leader and his wife, 'they' entails a gendered division in which he as leader acts/speaks/does and she as wife quietly supports his leadership. Describing cell group leadership in his church, Pete explained: 'There are six cells. I oversee one, so do Richard and Sue, and Tony and Jean.' 'So do you all lead one as well?' Mark asked. 'Yes,' Pete replied, 'the three of us all lead one as well.' Here women are viewed as extensions of their husbands, and 'I' used interchangeably with 'we'. Pete lists three married couples – six people – as cell overseers, then halves this number: 'the three of us all lead one.' Similar confusion in leadership couples between regarding wives as leaders or helpers is highlighted in Lisa Adkins' (1995) analysis of married couples working as management teams in the tourist industry. Adkins shows how the division of labour in the patriarchal family (the man is paid a wage while the wife does full-time unpaid support labour) is reinscribed in the workplace; this, she argues, exemplifies the retraditionalization of gender in late modernity (Adkins 2000).

If one contradiction surrounding leaders' wives is the gendered expectation that shared leadership involves men's primary and women's secondary activities, another is its near-inversion. Within some leading couples men are regarded as the overall leaders but women exhibit superior leadership skills. This was the case with Chris and Sarah. Explaining how she came to Westside, Sarah said:

> 'I came here because God called me and gave me a heart for the city. God loves cities, because there are so many people in them. He called me here before Chris and I had to wait for Chris.'

At this everyone laughed, as if mocking Chris' lesser sensitivity to God's call. Sarah was a competent leader and frequently anchored group meetings. She also seemed more administratively skilled than Chris, who often began church meetings by announcing future church events but forgot what he was supposed to say and had to be reminded by Sarah. The

competence of NFI leaders' wives compared with the relative incompetence of their husbands is continually present and was commented on by two women I interviewed, yet is only acknowledged in jest.

Women and prophecy

It has been argued, notably by I. M. Lewis (1989), that where they are marginalised politically, women (and oppressed men) exhibit ecstatic manifestations of spirit possession as a way of exercising agency and resisting men's dominance. Women's appropriation of bodily religious experiences as a challenge (conscious or unconscious) to male religious authority has a long tradition within Christianity (Bynum 1991). In the face of exclusion from official religious authority medieval women visionaries manifested a physical spirituality that demanded they be taken seriously as possessors of God's power (Jantzen 1995). In his work on present-day Sicilian Pentecostalists Salvatore Cucchiari notes that the Word, symbolising Scripture, authority and order, is a masculine domain, with leadership and teaching positions given to men. The Spirit is predominantly a feminine domain, and women play a major role as prophesiers. He observes that male authority ('word domination') is 'weakened and held in check by the centrality of Spirit experience' (Cucchiari 1990: 691, 703).

However, this and other research also shows how women's ecstatic or prophetic impulses are restrained and controlled by men in a way that reverses Cucchiari's point: (female) spiritual experiences are weakened and held in check by the centrality of (male) rationality and biblicism. And though women exercise agency through claiming spiritual possession, their ecstasy is provoked, Lewis demonstrates, by gendered power imbalances; spirit possession declines where women's social position improves. It is men's dominance that enables – or forces – women to prophesy and claim possession. Grace Jantzen (1995) also shows how in the late Middle Ages female visionary mystics had to demonstrate their orthodoxy and submission to male religious leaders for their visions to be granted authority; those who failed were executed as witches. Women's ecstatic or prophetic empowerment is often, therefore, curtailed by male ecclesiasts. The spirit experience represents a temporary breakdown of normative structures of space and time. And, as the beginning of the previous chapter explored, while evangelical Protestant history reveals that women often achieve

greater, almost equal, religious authority in exceptional periods of revival, once charisma is routinised (Weber 1964) men again take charge.

As Chapter 4 suggested, observations from Stoneleigh do not corroborate the claim that prophecy is an egalitarian medium. At Westside, however, prophecy provides a (potentially) egalitarian space where women as much as men can exert influence and where permission to share a prophecy need not be sought from a male leader. Prophecy plays a significant role in levelling off male dominance.[154] While prophecy is not a 'gift' all women believe they possess, those who consider themselves prophetic utilise prophecy to 'speak into' (their phrase) other people's lives and even steer the church's course.

Figures I collected indicate how often individuals gave or received prophecies.[155] There was barely any gender difference in the frequency of individuals giving or receiving prophecies. The most frequent prophesier was Chris, but Sarah prophesied almost as often. The third most frequent prophesier was Emma, followed by Simon, then Ruth. Those given prophecies by others most often were (in this order) Mark, me, Dawn, Marion and Tom.

Whether a relationship existed between the prophesier's, or the recipient's, gender and the metaphors used in the prophecy should also be examined. The content of the prophecies was sometimes traditionally gendered – I heard prophecies that gendered their male and female recipients in ways that accorded with separate spheres concepts of gender (metaphors used praised strength in men or beauty in women, for example). Yet prophecies were also often ungendered or transgressed these gender patterns.

My tentative observation is that female prophesiers are more likely than men to use subversive metaphors, either picturing male recipients in non-masculine images, or (more often) describing female recipients with masculine imagery. Images of the Christian engaging in 'spiritual warfare' (see Chapter 7) were given a few times using military metaphors: once Sarah, as I prayed for her, pictured herself holding a sword she believed symbolised the power of Bible that was in her possession. This is not to say that female

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[154] A similar case could be made for prayer.

[155] My fieldnotes recorded the prophecies given at each meeting. I forgot some, and failed to hear some when we were split into smaller groups. It is also likely that I remembered more of the prophecies that were addressed to me or that appeared gendered. This may be one reason for my finding that I was the second most likely (proportionately to my attendance) to be given a prophecy by someone else; I may not have received more than others, but simply recorded more of those given to me. I calculated my statistics by working out how many prophecies individuals gave or received per week at which they attended. For example, Ruth attended for seventeen weeks, gave five prophecies and received four. She therefore gave 0.294 prophecies per attendance, and received 0.235. As I have pointed out, the difficulty of recalling after the event all prophecies given render these statistics approximate.

prophesiers eschewed stereotypical images for women: Emma believed that God had given her a 'picture' of me looking in a mirror and told her he wanted me to know he considered me beautiful.

Male prophesiers were more likely to stick to traditionally gendered images that sometimes, I believe problematically, equated appropriate female spirituality with physical beauty. At the first meeting I attended, Simon prophesied that Jenny had 'slimmed down.' This meant, he told her, that 'God says you're getting rid of the sin, getting the self out of you, so that you're just filled with God.' Another time Chris gave me a prophecy that 'God's doing very deep work inside you, making you into a beautiful woman of God, so that he shines out of you.' Simon once prophesied to Ruth: 'I see one of those posters for CK[156] with Kate Moss[157] and God says you're going to be known like that for what you do for God.' Ruth was also the recipient of a prophecy equating her, in appearance, to a statue of Joan of Arc. Simon told her:

> 'When I looked at you sitting there your skin looked pale. I don't know if you're seen the sun less than other people here, but your skin looked white, and you looked like a delicate porcelain statue, feminine. It made me think of a statue of Joan of Arc that you'd see in an old church. God says you're going to do things that will make you renowned – not necessarily that you'll have a statue of you, but in God's sight you'll be renowned.'

This comparison is fascinating. In appearance, Ruth conforms to conventional norms (even ideals) of femininity. Joan of Arc did not. Her adoption of masculine dress and actions in response to voices she claimed were sent by God as she led the French army to victory at Orleans are anything but conventionally feminine (Warner 1981; Brownmiller 1984: 92). Simon's endorsement of unconventional feminine behaviour and appearance combines with an upholding of statuesque, 'delicate', 'pale' – in other words conventional – feminine appearance in a postfeminist fusion.

Some male prophesiers, though, did subvert conservatively gendered ideologies. Chris announced: 'God's saying he's like a mother hen with all her little chicks under her wing; he wants to cover us with his love.' Simon told Marion she was like someone issuing orders in a battle or a captain looking out to sea and warning of approaching enemies.

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[156] Perfume by designer Calvin Klein.
[157] Famous British model.

Furthermore, Chris used prophecy partially to affirm feminist critiques of women's marginality, telling Marion: 'I feel God's saying you've felt limited, maybe because you're a woman but God says he's got so much for you to do and you're not limited.' Yet this is a partial, postfeminist, affirmation because he simultaneously denies feminist critiques by asserting that although Marion may have *felt* limited, this feeling was misperceived because 'God's…got so much for you to do.'

Compared with other aspects of congregational life, prophesying is a powerful way in which women, and aspects associated with femininity, achieve privilege and recognition. On my first visit to Westside an incident occurred that demonstrated how prophecy and its accompanying emotionalism are used to rebuke rationalism. Moreover, women utilise prophecy to rebuke men they believe are over-rational.

After Simon gave Jenny the slimming-down prophecy Mark volunteered to be 'prophesied over.' As was usual practice, he stood in the centre of the room, closed his eyes as if 'receiving' (from God), while other group members asked God to give them 'words' for Mark. Sarah said God had given her two 'pictures' (visions or images), one of a bottle of fizzy lemonade which would be unable to 'fizz out' unless the cap was removed, and one of a pus-filled spot that needed to be squeezed. After several others Jane gave a prophecy, admitting caution because as his wife she was unsure whether she was speaking from God's inspiration or her own knowledge. Mark had always felt that his faith was 'more intellectual' and wished it was 'more experiential' like Jane's, she said: 'His faith is in doctrine but he doesn't have much of an experience of God.' But she believed God was telling him that 'that's going to change', that, as Sarah's pictures suggested, God wanted to remove the constraints keeping him from experiencing God tangibly. Mark seemed relieved. Simon prayed: 'let him not just know doctrine, Lord, let him know you.' I was struck by the notion that although Mark was a Christian, his faith was not real because it was rational rather than experiential; somehow he did not 'know' God. Someone else shared an image of bees cooped up in a nest and needing to be released. Chris asked Emma if she could 'pray that for Mark,' which she did, adding 'I feel like I want to clap.' Chris encouraged her and she began clapping rhythmically, praying: 'Lord, release the bees, release the bees in Jesus' name.' This assertion that spirit experience is a sign of real Christianity reveals and then subverts separate spheres notions that men should be rational and unemotional. To rebuke Mark's over-intellectualism is to rebuke his conformity to Enlightenment ideals of men as rational agents

(Seidler 1989, 1994) and to enforce a softer, more emotional masculinity – to persuade Mark to take on characteristics that under separate spheres ideals were considered feminine.

The emotionally charged behaviour of Emma, a musician who often 'led worship', is hard to capture descriptively. Emma regularly interspersed congregational songs with spontaneous love songs to God in which she addressed Jesus as 'beautiful saviour' and 'my love.'[158] Many of the songs she chose for group worship originated from the American Vineyard movement, whose intimate, sacralised eroticism Percy (1997b, 1998) discusses. Percy suggests the eroticism of Vineyard worship draws on individualistic notions of love and romance within postmodern culture. It is also possible that for Emma, a single woman in her twenties who often articulated an unfulfilled desire to be married, intimacy with God represents a substitution for or sublimation of sexual intimacy, just as Percy suggests it did for middle-aged women during the mid-1990s charismatic evangelical revivalistic episode the 'Toronto Blessing'. Mindful of the history of women's use of ecstatic experiences to create a space for themselves in a context governed by men, Percy (1998: 154) suggests: 'Might it be that evangelical women, who are also charismatic, are finding a way of avoiding the constraints of the doctrines of headship, or reservations about their presence in positions of official leadership?' Evidence from Westside suggests that while this avoidance may remain incomplete and confined to the prophetic event, it is nonetheless visible and important.

Conclusions

Although NFI and Westside can be described as postfeminist in their attitude to church roles, NFI adhere more closely to separate spheres notions than Westside. While NFI possess three primary justifications for women's exclusion from eldership (male authority, women's unique role and women's tendency to be 'Jezebellic'), Westside endorse only one, male authority. NFI's 'feminist' argument for the 'release' of each individual to use their talents is more present in Westside. In their meetings and gatherings Westside members' reluctance – other than when pushed during interviews – to oppose female church leadership,

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[158] June Hadden Hobbs (1997) explores in her history of evangelical hymnody 1870-1920 how hymn-writing – more formal than Emma's spontaneous singing – provided women with a voice in a church culture that did not allow women's leadership.

and their expression of egalitarian attitudes to ministry, signify an egalitarianism greater than is visible at large-scale NFI events or expressed by leaders I interviewed. Chris' desire that the minimal gender-role differentiation he advocated occurred 'in the context of men and women being equal' is surely evidence of his postfeminist adherence to both conservative and feminist discourses.

Like Wendy Virgo, the Westside leader's wife Sarah possessed authority and standing. Yet various tensions remain – such as between regarding her as a leader in her own right or as a support figure to the leader Chris – and Westside members' understandings of these tensions reveal the degree to which they uphold gender discourses that are conservative, feminist or postfeminist.

Unlike in 'official' NFI settings where their prophetic influence is minimal, Westside women possess greatest scope in prophecy, which in Westside functions as a more egalitarian medium than, for example, teaching or worship leading. Prophesying allows women to exercise religious agency and authority and challenge male dominance and rationality. Additionally, the images used in prophecy are often gendered, sometimes conservatively, sometimes in a subversive, feminist manner. Furthermore, the presence of Jenny and other feminist women demonstrates that feminist challenges are present and potent, yet marginalised and unstable; an overall framework of male dominance curtails their influence on Westside.

Westside's greater openness than NFI in general to women's involvement in prominent church roles may be partly explained by Westside's smallness and newness. As religious organisations become institutionalised, women's involvement decreases. Women's charismatic role is squeezed out by male-dominated bureaucracy. In contrast to the public feel of large-scale NFI events like Stoneleigh and larger NFI congregations, Westside existed in a more private space. With most meetings in the members' homes and a membership that numbered only two dozen when I left, Westside's settings were intimate. In addition, while Chris was the main leader, with Mark and Pete also recognised as leaders, their positions were not official. NFI overseers had not 'laid hands' on these men and pronounced them elders, as happens at a church's public 'launch' when it has accrued several dozen members and begun regular Sunday meetings. The smallness, privacy, informality and intimacy of Westside are likely to account partly for the greater presence of feminist views and practices in the congregational setting.

Chapter 6

Marriage

Introduction

Marriage and family, many argue, are central to evangelical identity. They signify social order, they socialise children. Through them evangelicals assert a distinctive religious identity amongst and against multiplying alternative family and relational arrangements. Furthermore, within marriage evangelicals construct and assert particular formulae regarding gender, positioning men as leaders and women as subservient. Evangelicalism holds fast to an ideal of heterosexual gender complementarity. These observations are true historically, as shown in Bendroth (1993) and DeBerg's (1990) work on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American fundamentalists and Davidoff and Hall's (1987) on middle-class Britain, 1780-1850. Their observations describe many contemporary churches too, as qualitative research demonstrates (Ammerman 1987, 1990; Brasher 1998; Griffith 1997; Bartkowski 2001; Gallagher 2003). Marriage and the nuclear family are often exalted as biblical blueprints for all times and cultures.

Yet not only are the family and marriage in decline; feminist critiques have also challenged them ideologically. Some (e.g. Wuthnow 1988) suggest that it is these that prompt conservative evangelicals to assert marriage even more vociferously. Conservatives, it is claimed, are fighting to protect marriage from the ravages of egalitarian modernity. Stacey (1998) considers American evangelicals' preoccupation with 'the family' as a kind of post-industrial nostalgia for a 'traditional' family. But as Hunter (1987) and others suggest, the 'traditional' family certain evangelicals idealise is in fact the nineteenth-century bourgeois family. Furthermore, though some evangelicals take refuge in this nuclear family, not only is it declining in the West, but evangelicals too are living lives far less different from their secular peers than they claim. Growing rates of evangelical women's employment outside the home contrast with religious 'homemaker' ideologies (Ammerman 1987: 136-

137; Hall 1995; Gallagher 2003: 127-151). Additionally, secular and evangelical feminist family reforms have permeated evangelicalism, with the consequence that evangelicals are embracing both conservative/traditional and egalitarian/progressive ideas of marriage and the family, sometimes simultaneously (Bartkowski 2001; Brasher 1998; Stacey 1998).

With reference to the British discourse of separate spheres, its backlash reassertion and feminism that contribute to the position of tension I call postfeminist, this chapter explores NFI and Westside's understandings and practice of marriage. Although many issues are pertinent this chapter is confined to the marriage relationship itself; parenthood, domestic labour and sex (discussed in Chapter 7) are mentioned only in passing. While this separation is not ideal (since marriages are often negotiated in conjunction with parental responsibilities), it prevents duplication. Additionally, it places the focus on a central institution of evangelical Christianity, the marriage relationship.

Separate spheres marriage

Notwithstanding the critiques of this position attended to in Chapter 3 there is evidence for the existence of a separate spheres discourse and/or pattern of marriage and family from the late eighteenth, and through the nineteenth, centuries. The gendering of marriage involved not simply the home/work split which positioned men as paid workers and their wives as home-based childcarers and domestic workers. Gender differentiation related to the marriage relationship itself. Men were regarded as 'head' in their homes; women were encouraged to be in submission to their husbands' authority. Women's subjection was enshrined in English law (Pateman 1988: 154-188). Upon marriage a woman, who was considered the weaker sex, passed from the tutelage of her father to that of her husband. In law wives and husbands were regarded as one person; that person, wrote Sir William Blackstone in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769), was represented by the husband: 'The very being, or legal existence of a woman is suspended during marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection and cover she performs everything' (quoted in Perkin 1989: 1-2). She became, as Perkin (1989: 2) puts it, 'a *feme covert*, a hidden person, sunk into and merged with the personality of her husband.' The degree to which women experienced marriage as subordination varied, especially by class (Perkin 1989: 3-7).

The sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers partly brought about the authority-submission marriage; Rosemary Radford Ruether (2001) in fact considers Protestantism chiefly responsible for creating the modern, middle-class, nuclear family. Rejecting celibacy (see Chapter 8), the reformers privileged marriage as holy, advocating with reference to passages like Col. 3:18-19[159] and Eph. 5:21-33,[160] a pattern wherein men were God's appointed heads who (benignly) commanded while their wives willingly obeyed. However thoroughly notions of companionship and spiritual unity subverted these gender patterns, and notwithstanding disputes about how new such ideals were (Davies 1981), from the Reformation and seventeenth-century Puritanism, wives' submission to husbands' authority was emphasised. It was apparent in men's control over household finance; men's right to beat their wives; the expectation that women would take their husbands' surnames and move from 'Miss' to 'Mrs'[161]; and wives' use of titles of honour to address their husbands (Davies 1981). Additionally, women lacked the right to initiate divorce (though men could); if they did get divorced their husbands possessed legal custody of any children. At marriage women lost their rights to own property or claim their own earnings (Perkin 1989; Shanley 1989).

Feminist marriage

Women's marital subordination began eroding in the mid nineteenth century. Women's rights activists focused on reforming marriage, instituting campaigns for married women to retain ownership of property and earnings they brought to the marriage, initiate divorce proceedings and to be allowed to be granted custody of children after divorce. This

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[159] 'Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.'

[160] 'Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no-one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.'

[161] Designations which in the nineteenth century started to differentiate between single and married, rather than as formerly between younger and older, women (Spender 1980: 27; Miller & Swift 1976: 99; Davidoff & Hall 1987: 273).

campaigning was eventually successful. The 1870 and 1882 Married Women's Property Acts enabled married women to own property. The 1857 Divorce Act enabled women whose husbands were adulterous and violent to sue for divorce; in 1923 they won the right to sue for divorce on the same grounds as men (Perkin 1989; Shanley 1989; Roberts 1995). Some more radical feminists renounced marriage entirely (Jeffreys 1985).

Another wave of discontent about marriage broke in the 1960s. Betty Friedan's (1963) *The Feminine Mystique* in America and Hannah Gavron's (1966) *The Captive Wife* in Britain analysed the situation of middle-class housewives. Friedan identified 'the problem that has no name', the loneliness, boredom and intellectual barrenness of 1950s housewives socialised into trying to live the 'feminine mystique' that considered marriage, motherhood and sexual passivity women's natural and ideal destinies. Jessie Bernard (1973) showed that housewives suffered high rates of depression. Ann Oakley's (1974) *The Sociology of Housework* and (1976) *Housewife* followed, based like Gavron's study on interview research among married women. Some analyses (like Friedan's and Gavron's) were largely liberal feminist calls for women to achieve educationally and work outside the home.

Socialist and Marxist feminists (Mitchell 1966, 1971; Barrett & McIntosh 1982; Pateman 1988; Delphy & Leonard 1992; Walby 1990) exposed marriage as an economic system that functioned by exploiting women's unpaid labour. They labelled this system patriarchal, benefiting men and ensuring their dominance. Women's domestic work is constant, whereas men's work is confined to restricted hours at a workplace. In addition, the economic, cultural, emotional, sexual and reproductive work (Delphy & Leonard 1992: 21-22) women do within the home is not, within the public/private dichotomy, considered 'proper' work. And, by not being paid, women remain dependent upon their husbands.

Viewing marriage as a primary arena of men's domination, radical feminists exposed its potential danger. They revealed that domestic violence – from which escape can be difficult because of women's financial dependence – was a feature of many marriages. They also criticised language as patriarchal. Adopting their husbands' surnames made women (in effect) their husbands' property, while the Miss/Mrs marital status differentiation that did not exist for men signalled to men whether or not women were 'available', thus defining them by their relationship to men (Spender 1980: 24-28). These critiques prompted many feminist

women to 'refuse to be a wife' (VanEvery 1995),[162] rejecting marriage in favour of non-marital partnerships (heterosexual and gay), non-monogamy, living with friends or celibacy (see Chapter 8).

Features of these feminist critiques have entered popular discourse around marriage. For a brief period in the early 1980s it was reported that the pro-feminist 'new man' had arrived. Positioned as counterpoint to a macho, patriarchal man, the new man supported equality and emotionally intimate couple relationships and shared domestic work (Chapman 1988; Ayto 1999: 552; Knowles 1997: 212-213). How far the new man existed, or remained a media projection, is disputed (Mort 1996; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill 2003: 50-53). If advertising reacts to rather than creates social trends, it seems likely that men did express aspects of new masculinity (Chapman 1988). Rowena Chapman points to a plausible reading of the new man: that in rebelling against authoritative, breadwinner masculinity, an ideal reasserted in the 1950s, he held common cause with feminists.

Backlash marriage

Since the nineteenth century there have been two anti-feminist backlashes. The first, singled out for critique by second-wave pioneer Friedan (1963), occurred in the 1950s. The 1950s was the last decade during which separate spheres was the dominant form of gender ideology – indeed, the last decade when the concept of women or men possessing distinctive 'roles' was evidently operating. It represented a reassertion, after first-wave feminism, of separate spheres marriage.

The absence of men in Britain during the two World Wars had challenged separate spheres, requiring women to work in positions previously held by men (Bruley 1999: 60-70, 119-129; Hall 2000: 142-6). Strengthening the nuclear family was central to post-war social reconstruction. Marriages increased and happened earlier. A post-war 'baby boom' compensated for the falling birth rates of the 1930s and early 1940s (Finch & Summerfield 1991). The government endeavoured to promote women's domesticity so that jobs existed for the returning men, and many women were happy to return to a domestic life and bear the

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[162] VanEvery puts 'wife' in inverted commas, redefining the term as 'the particular social position of women as subordinates of individual men' (1995: 15), a perhaps unhelpfully broad definition. This also signals feminism's dual critique of marriage. While some feminists refuse to marry, others marry but reject marriage's patriarchal aspects.

children their husbands' absence had denied them.[163] Because the 1950s witnessed economic growth, full employment and high incomes, many husbands could provide for a stay-at-home wife and children. Women's wages decreased, and the government rejected calls for better pay for women, thus creating a disincentive for women to work (Summerfield 1984: 174-178). Another deterrent was the 1946 abolition of nursery subsidies (Riley 1983). The post-war rebuilding programme aided the nuclear family. People could no longer reside close to their extended families and became isolated in nuclear family units. As in the nineteenth century, middle-class women were the most likely to be housewives. The post-war 'instrumental' breadwinner husband/ 'expressive' nurturing wife nuclear family pattern was expounded as conducive to family function, notably by 1950s sociologist Talcott Parsons (Parsons & Bales 1956). The 1950s version of separate spheres, unlike its nineteenth-century predecessor, was more isolating and disempowering for women, who had fewer children and neither servants to manage nor extended families nearby (Lasch 1997).

The second backlash is linked to the New Right rejection of 1960s and 1970s leftist and feminist critiques of marriage. The New Right accused feminists of destroying the family and undermining paternal authority. Though their philosophy in respect of gender was not uniformly a separate spheres one, Thatcher's Conservative government introduced a number of policies supporting those in nuclear families and penalising others. Reduction in welfare spending hit those outside self-sufficient nuclear family units (often female-headed households) hardest. Moral pressure groups, often using Christian and/or biologically essentialist arguments, advocated the reinstatement of men as household heads (Abbott & Wallace 1992; Berger & Berger 1983; Harding 1999; Berger 2002). Not all such arguments were stridently conservative. Brigitte Berger, for example, wants to capture a 'middle ground' between a conservative pro- and liberal anti-nuclear family philosophy. For her, the nuclear family is the superior family form because it is best suited to 'supply individuals with the strength and flexibility to meet the challenges of the modern world' (Berger 2002: 230). Popular literature, notably Marabel Morgan's (1973) American bestseller *The Total Woman*, espoused the 'neo-traditional' (Berger & Berger 1983: 28) male-headed, female-compliant marriage. Contemporary American texts like Laura Doyle's (1999) *The Surrendered Wife*,

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[163] Others preferred to remain in paid employment. Although the 1950s represented a return to the separate spheres family, married women's employment rates continued rising, from 10% in 1931 to 21% by 1951 and 47% by 1972 (Wilson 1980: 41).

Laura Schlessinger's (2003) *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* and, more subtly, John Gray's (1992) *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, also successful in Britain, argue that women submitting to their male partners' (preferably husbands') authoritative leadership is key to successful intimate relationships. Perhaps influenced by this pro-marriage advocacy and the Christian arguments within it, the 1980s saw the first (and sole since the 1960s) (small) rise not in the proportion of weddings *per se*, but in the proportion conducted in church (Brierley 1997: 4.9; Brown 2001: 167). The egalitarian new man disappeared from popular discourse, to be replaced by the 'new lad' (discussed in Chapter 7).

Postfeminist marriage

Other popular writing has taken a more postfeminist turn. In Sarah Gamble's (1999: 44) interpretation, postfeminism 'seeks to develop an agenda which can find a place for men, as lovers, husbands and fathers as well as friends'. 'Postfeminist' Natasha Walter (2003) and Naomi Wolf (1995) embrace heterosexual relationships and marriage, maintaining liberal feminist egalitarian partnership ideals.

What I shall introduce as a postfeminist notion of marriage has arisen alongside changes in marriage and partnership in Britain, and notably a decline in marriage. Since a peak of 480,000 marriages (of post-war baby boomers) in 1972, the number decreased to a low of 301,000 in 1999. In 1971 71% of men and 65% of women were married; in 2000 54% of men and 52% of women were. Since 1970-71, the number of first marriages has halved, and the average age at first marriage has risen from 25.5 to 30.5 for men, and 22.5 to 28 for women. The reduced stigma attached to divorce and changes in divorce laws have made divorce easier and more frequent. Since the 1969 Divorce Reform Act divorce has more than tripled, though after a 1993 peak it declined a little. Greater social acceptance of cohabitation has reduced the number of marriages; in 2000-2001 a quarter of non-married adults (age 16 to 59) were cohabiting (ONS 2003: 45-47). Household composition is moving away from the nuclear family type. In 2002 58% of households contained a couple (with or without children), while only 29% contained a couple and their children (ONS 2003: 42). Marriage has become one among many 'postmodern' family forms (Stacey 1998) – cohabitation, serial

monogamy, 'living apart together,'[164] lone parenthood, step-parenthood, lesbian and gay relationships and the single-person household.

Marriage itself, it is argued, has become more 'companionate.' Marital relationships have shifted from 'institution' to 'relationship,' from a relation of duty and the sexual division of labour to a realm of love and equality – especially, it is claimed, in the post-war years. Young and Willmott wrote in the early 1970s (1973) about what they called the 'symmetrical family', a new, egalitarian marital partnership transforming family life.[165] David Morgan (1991) interprets the popular discourse of marriage as relationship as embracing the beliefs that marriage is: an individual choice; the product of an already-existing intimate, companionate relationship; a source of stability and security; and, finally, that it is natural. Oakley (1974), Morgan (1991), Finch and Summerfield (1991) and Delamont (2001: 94-109) partially endorse the companionate marriage theory but argue that it obscures current gender inequalities in marriage. Giddens (1992) describes a 'pure relationship' of 'confluent love' in which partnerships are increasingly intimate, oriented towards appreciation of the other's unique qualities. 'Pure relationships' are entered for the satisfaction of those concerned and sustained while emotional satisfaction continues; they incorporate 'plastic sexuality' concerned with pleasure rather than procreation and are unencumbered by older notions of duty, structure and gender-based roles. Lynn Jamieson (1998, 1999) criticises Giddens for ignoring feminist scholarship revealing continuing gender differences and inequalities in heterosexual partnerships.

Jamieson (1998) paints a contradictory picture of personal relationships in contemporary Britain. While a 'disclosing intimacy' discourse exists of relationships sustained by deep sharing of feelings and ideas, also present are 'moral right' (what I call backlash) notions that 'proper' relationships are nuclear family marriages and an older discourse of highly sexually-driven men seducing women. The family at the beginning of the third millennium is therefore, as Beck-Gernsheim (2002: xi) puts it, 'the new relationship of tension.' This tension I call postfeminist holds together both separate spheres and revisionist (particularly feminist) versions in a context influenced by processes of reflexive modernization which reduce the dominance of the 'old' nineteenth-century gender patterns,

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[164] This refers to couples in an intimate relationship who do not live together (González-López 2002).
[165] However, some historians (e.g. Macfarlane 1986) date companionate marriage from at least the fourteenth century.

though do not erase them. Beck-Gernsheim argues that the family (and, I would stress, marriage) is facing a tension between an enduring rhetoric of 'family values' and the breakdown of established gender-differentiated roles in an economic context that ties people to state institutions which increasingly address them as individuals, not as part of families. The resultant proliferating family forms constitute what Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 10) calls the 'post-familial family.' As regards marriage itself, women and men and the government are caught between nostalgia for 'traditional' marriage and support of non-marital family forms. In Britain New Labour family policy has on the one hand stressed 'family values', while on the other so emphasised paid work done by the individual citizen as to belittle women's unpaid caring work (Barlow et al. 2002). This attitudinal postfeminist tension is present in the contemporary relationship and habitation patterns already outlined.

Postfeminist marriage in NFI

Marriage in public NFI discourse

In *Restoration in the Church*, Terry Virgo (1985: 78-80) explains that his churches stress the importance of 'Christian family life'. This, he says, will 'speak volumes in our crumbling society to many whose families are in sad disarray'. As non-Christian parents 'worship' 'gods' of ' humanism and liberal thinking', 'they are apparently willing to pay the price of their worship by sacrificing their marriages and producing insecure and troubled children'. For him, Christian family life requires restoration of the 'God-given order' of male-headed households, compliant wives and obedient children. This sort of marriage is, he argues, 'an expression of God's kingdom'. Marital equality is notionally present, for he stresses that 'a loving and mutually respectful attitude between husband and wife is the key to good family life', but men's authoritative, responsible role is emphasised more. 'The father, as head of the family, is responsible for the state of his household. He must therefore be aroused from the apathy associated with modern-day fathers in order to fulfil his God-given role,' Virgo writes, 'When children see their father loving, protecting and honouring his wife and giving her her true place in the home, they will learn to respect her themselves'. Exactly what the wife's 'true place in the home' constitutes is not spelled out.

In another book he discusses 'principles of the kingdom of God' which, he says, 'provide answers to all nations' needs.' For example:

> [God] has taught us about integrity, family life, the essential covenant of love between husband and wife. He has taught us that security and peace are the results of a marriage where a wife honours and recognizes her husband's headship and where the husband unselfishly loves and honours his wife. This generation has been duped by cries of 'Liberation for women!' only to find itself more entangled and confused than before. (T. Virgo 1987: 59)

Again, marriage is emphasised. Explicitly rejecting feminism as causing confusion, he argues that marital harmony will come from women's submission to their husbands' authority.

In her book on mothering, Wendy Virgo (1997) provides a detailed justification for women's submission, proposing that it is imitative of Jesus' attitude to God the Father. But though she gives a long explanation of attitudes accompanying submission, she says little about what submission practically entails, simply hinting that women leave to their husbands the most important decisions and the 'last word' in the event of disagreements. She regards women's submission not as an optional extra but as key to the Christian gospel: through it women counteract the sin of the first woman, Eve, and speed the recovery of God's 'original plan' of male-headed, female-submissive marriage.

> In the beginning God intended, and created, two people living in harmony. This was spoiled when the woman, lured by Satan, disobeyed God, and their unity was disrupted. Thus, 'going your own way', 'doing your own thing', self-assertion, dissention and disagreement became the norm.
>
> Then God in Christ reconciled us with himself, and made it possible for us to live in harmony with one another. In Christian marriage God is restoring his original plan where the man and woman are to live in a secure, loving, fulfilling relationship, the man being the head, and the woman the helper. (W. Virgo 1997: 112-113)

In her 1998 'spirit of Jezebel' talk discussed earlier Wendy Virgo advocates male authority ('headship') and female submission as alternatives to 'Jezebellic' rebellion:

> I don't go back to the Victorian age because I am applying the principle of male headship. I go back to creation and it's a long way and I'm proud of that. There's stability that comes, there's that sense of inheritance. I am part of a chain that goes from creation right up to the end, till we get to glory and there's a new heaven and a new earth, and I am perpetuating something that God started and God is continuing

> and God will finish. And so male headship is not something to avoid in my view, or something to avoid and be frightened of; it's something to declare and stand in with dignity and pride. I am part of a creation ordinance that God has declared and I am happy to embrace it and tuck under it. And I am happy to embrace and tuck under my particular covering,[166] in case you were wondering [laughs]. (W. Virgo 1998)

Conscious of accusations that her stance is 'Victorian,' she evokes the Genesis 2 creation story as the foundation for marital gender differentiation. She denies Victorian influence, yet her application of the term 'covering' dovetails closely with the Victorian pre-feminist legal treatment of marriage as an institution in which wives become subsumed under the 'cover' (authority and protection) of their husbands.

'Headship', a word so little used in the context of marriage or gender that this connotation does not appear in the multi-volume *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED 1989: 50), is more or less peculiar to evangelical Christianity, where it is the crucial doctrine governing gender relations (Ingersoll 2001). It is, Storkey critically remarks, an intriguing example of the disputable practice of 'build[ing] a theology on a metaphor' (Storkey & Hebblethwaite 1999: 143), creating a doctrine out of a term which does not appear in the Bible evangelicals claim as their source of authority. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of headship to evangelicals; headship is what obstructed evangelicals from accepting women as church leaders, for example (Craston 1973; Keay 1986; Storkey 1995b).

Storkey (1985a: 180-183) describes four evangelical versions of headship. One regards headship as 'the defining characteristic of all relationships between men and women'. Another limits it to marriage and the church and a third to marriage. A fourth considers headship culturally dependent and no longer applicable. Ingersoll (2001) restricts her typology to marriage, delineating four headship practices in evangelical marriages. In the first, husbands are the leaders and main decision-makers. For the second, Ingersoll uses the phrase 'patriarchy in the last resort' which she attributes to Stacey (1998). In this model, husbands theoretically possess ultimate responsibility and should have the final say in the case of disputes, yet they consult their wives fully so that all decisions are actually made jointly. More fully, Stacey argues that while evangelicals embrace headship, they reinterpret it as servanthood; as heads, men are expected to behave sacrificially towards their wives. Headship also means that the man should, in cases of dispute over important decisions, make

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[166] A reference to her husband.

the final decision – this is the meaning of 'patriarchy in the last resort' or 'last instance' (Stacey & Gerard 1990: 116). Yet the last instance 'never comes' (Stacey 1998: 59); no one Stacey interviewed could give a personal account of this happening during her or his own marriage. Stacey additionally encountered the view that if dispute necessitated a husband taking the final decision, this would be evidence of the husband's *failure* to lead his family lovingly. Ingersoll's third practice of headship applies it also to society and church, where only men can lead. The fourth interpretation belongs to evangelical feminists, who argue for both partners' 'mutual submission' to each other.[167]

While belief in male authority and female submission in marriage has a long history within evangelicalism, evidence suggests that not only was male church leadership stressed by evangelicals (notably Restorationists) as part of a backlash against secular feminism, but so was headship in marriage. Men's authority in marriage was regularly asserted in early Restorationist publications (A. Wallis 1979; Mansell 1982; Matthew 1982; Morton 1982; T. Virgo 1982; Bilton 1985). Headship in marriage was again stressed in the backlash against evangelical feminism from the late 1980s. Like Piper and Grudem's (1991) *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, another book promoted widely within NFI, Grudem's (1999) *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*, sees male headship as one of these essential doctrines, giving one of its three chapters on 'The Doctrine of Man' to 'Man as male and female' (advocating male headship).[168] In 2000 NFI launched their 'WordPlus' home Bible study course, in which 'Man and woman' was one of twenty-one modules. NFI have continued holding seminars at Stoneleigh Bible Week advocating male leadership and female submission.

At the penultimate Stoneleigh, Lindsey Pettit (2000) spoke at length on the importance of female submission. Like Wendy Virgo she repudiated 'images of downtrodden Victorian wives' generated by the term 'submission'. She described her struggle coming to terms with the requirement to submit to her husband but explains that when she realised submission was God's desire, it brought not suffocation but joy and freedom. Based in God's created differences between men and women, equal in worth but different in 'roles and functions', submission reflects God's ordered world. This world is full of relationships of

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[167] It is debateable whether this last interpretation should be called 'headship', since evangelical feminists often eschew the term.
[168] 'The Creation of Man' and 'Sin' are the others.

submission and authority: as Jesus submitted to God the Father, children should submit to parents, employees to employers, citizens to governing authorities and wives to husbands. Pettit argues that submission is not only appropriate for marriage between Christians. As Peter recommends[169] women married to unbelieving men should also submit; submission will act as a persuasive tool to convert them to Christianity. Attempting to deal with domestic abuse, Pettit recommends continued submission, but adds that the situation may be more complex and require prayer and consultation with church elders. In sum, submission 'doesn't mean being passive; we are free to disagree and differ.' After Pettit's talk, Wendy Virgo added that submission brings women power: 'We're not submitting to our husbands because we've been told to, or it's a thing they do in Christian circles. It's so that the Word of God is given honour and we find it to have power in our lives.'

The notion of submission bringing power, important throughout Restorationist gender ideology,[170] suggests common ground with feminism's support for women's agency. There are further contradictions around authority and submission and how far evangelical interpretations incorporate feminist understandings. The notion that women's submission to their husbands will bring 'security', 'peace', 'harmony' and 'joy', to use terms in NFI discourse, is partly true. Female submission 'works' in that it provides men with willing helpers to tend to their emotional, practical and sexual desires; it works insofar as it pleases men. It sometimes also works for women, in creating better husbands (Brusco 1995, 1997). Marie Griffith (1997: 175) describes how members of the American evangelical charismatic Women's Aglow Fellowship testify that submitting to their husbands has brought them happiness: 'once women's attitudes are transformed and they accept their submissive role, their husbands also become happier and more benevolent, reflecting the benevolence of God.'[171] Griffith (1997: 178-179) explains that submission is not simply about women 'participating in their own victimization.' Rather, it is 'a doctrine with a fluid history'. She describes four different versions of submission from which women select, often in mix-and-match fashion. First, women regard submitting to God as a way to release the power of a benevolent God who wills the women's happiness. The second requires complete submission

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[169] 'Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.' (1 Pet. 3:1-2)

[170] Eileen Wallis' (1985) *Queen Take Your Throne: How to be a Woman of Authority* is an earlier example.

[171] It is important to remember, though, that this view is the 'official' ideology propagated through Aglow's official literature; other women's (unpublished) experiences may be less positive.

to the husband 'as God's representative and leader of the home' (this one appears to minimise women's potential for influence). The third 'accepts the husband *as he is* while retaining some room for private critique of his behavior.' The fourth she calls 'containment'; it is 'a submission more of word than of deed that celebrates the power to influence – or, in less flattering terms, manipulate – one's husband to one's own ends' (Griffith 1997: 185).

While calls for submission and authority are often set in opposition to feminism, they share aspects of feminism's social critique. Although they offered different solutions, both Friedan's (1963) *The Feminine Mystique* and Morgan's (1973) *The Total Woman* revealed and criticised the unhappy, restricted situation of the housewife; David Harrington Watt (1991: 131-136) notes further ways in which Morgan drew on feminist critiques and gave room for female self-assertion. Calls for wholehearted female submission are a response to women's powerlessness in relation to their husbands. They represent attempts, with what resources these women possess, to assert some control within their marriages. Women's very submission becomes a way to control their husbands, thus awarding them a kind of empowerment. Susan Maushart (2002: 215-229) argues that in a context where divorce – a situation women rarely experience as empowering – is prevalent, conservative ideologues give unhappily married women hope, at least at the outset of their quest for better relationships. Maushart (2002: 219-220) also points out that surrendering 'works' insofar as 'it reduces conflict and clarifies roles and responsibilities'. Indeed, the partial functionality of male authority and female submission ideology is what has made backlash books so successful. It is also what appeared to justify Talcott Parsons' reading of these gender-differentiated functions in the middle-class nuclear family: authority and submission help relationships function.

Yet a gulf remains between submission/authority ideology and feminist views of marriage and partnership. Feminists continue to demonstrate the costs women incur in patriarchal relationships, showing that marriage is often better for men than for women.[172] Surveys of hours spent on housework in British couple households consistently show that even when men and women both work full-time outside the home, women do the bulk of domestic tasks (Ramos 2003). Gender-role differentiated relationships operate through power differentials which demand that women's needs become secondary to men's and which leave

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[172] Data concerning divorce indicates this: wives initiate over two-thirds of divorce proceedings (70% in 1999) (ONS 2001: 47).

women vulnerable to selfishness or abuse from less benevolent male partners; marriages where the man is considered to have authority over his wife are particularly likely settings for domestic violence, it is argued (Dobash & Dobash 1979). Authority and submission in a nuclear family may be functional, but this does not render them fulfilling; the strength of response to Friedan's 1963 call to arms around this issue demonstrates that.

Evidence suggests that some NFI women experience this lack of marital fulfilment. I came across several hints that married NFI women suffer depression. A woman who was for many years involved in Restorationist churches told me she had observed that married women in NFI, including wives of leaders, exhibited high rates of depression.[173] More verifiable are the veiled references to unhappiness in women's sessions at Stoneleigh. Liz Holden's (2000) seminar talk 'Nothing to prove, plenty to enjoy' described the 'low self-esteem' and 'lack of contentment' women often experience. At the end of the seminar another woman said that she felt God wanted them to set free through prayer women who feel isolated and trapped. If this is true, it is likely that Friedan's 'problem that has no name' is alive today amongst these British women trying to conform to the submissive ideal.[174]

A husband's role is not only to take authority; it is also to 'unselfishly love and honour' his wife (T. Virgo 1987: 59). It is vital to recognise this command to evangelical men, for it is almost always present within evangelical discourse recommending wifely submission. It operates as a crucial brake upon overly harsh male authority. Stressing that Jesus is the model for this 'servant leadership', evangelicals argue that men have a responsibility to 'love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her' (Eph. 5:25).[175] In fact, this 'other side' of the submission/authority argument is what renders evangelical marriage discourses like NFI's less conservative, more feminist, than Morgan's *The Total Woman*, Doyle's *The Surrendered Wife* and Schlessinger's *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands*, texts which claim that happy marriages depend on *women* and do not require men to change. The call to 'servant leadership' exerts a powerful hold on men and a powerful moderating force upon the meanings 'authority' and 'headship' hold –

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[173] Conversation, London, 27th January 2004.

[174] Unsurprisingly, I found it difficult to obtain information about violence against women in NFI. However, at the end of Pettit's (2000) seminar she offered to pray for women who were in abusive relationships; this indicates awareness that violence exists in some NFI women's marriages (though her response to it did not appear well-formulated).

[175] For examples of this advice to husbands in NFI literature see J. and L. Wilthew 1991: 46-51 and Hosier 1998: 32-3.

some evangelicals so stress men's obligation to sacrifice themselves for their wives and consult them when making decisions that men's leadership of the marriage is negligible. Sacrificial leadership theology produces men resembling pro-feminist 'new men'. So in addition to the 'sacred catch' of male authority that Brasher (1998: 148-149) describes – that in exchange for decision-making power men must live with the fear that God will judge them harshly if they are selfish or mistreat their wives – men's authority is undercut by notions of sacrifice and mutual submission.

In *Women Set Free* Wendy Virgo (1989: 129) urges men to take authority, adding that this does not just mean that husbands are 'over' wives, but also that they provide 'support, encouragement and security'. She gives two examples of authority and submission operating within her own marriage. Once, Terry was invited to speak at a church leaders' conference overseas and Wendy was asked to speak to their wives. While she knew that Terry felt she should go, she did not know whether God wanted her to. Terry left her to 'hear God for myself', rather than telling her what to do. She was, she writes,

> totally free from pressure as I prayed about it. I knew that Terry would accept it if I said 'No', because he would believe that this was how I perceived God's leading…I also had the security of knowing that if I could come to no clear decision, he would help me make it. (W. Virgo 1989: 130)

In the end she went. But while she uses this story to demonstrate the importance of women submitting, it in fact reveals a much more egalitarian relationship. Although it shows how her belief in Terry's authority and protection gave her 'security' that he would, if necessary, make the decision for her, Terry barely exercises this authority, leaving the decision to her and considering her perception of God's guidance more important than any advice he could give. Her second example is similar:

> He noticed my downcast face as he prepared to go away yet again. That evening we discussed his absences which had become even more frequent. He took seriously what I had to say and adjusted his diary accordingly. I need never fear my husband's authority; he cares for my welfare and this makes it easy to submit to him and make room for his headship. We are a team working together. One is the leader, but both of us retain our dignity and are fulfilled. (W. Virgo 1989: 130)

Here, while Terry initiates a conversation about the frequency of his absences, he does so in response to her unhappiness and changes his work schedule as she desires. Like the first example, while Wendy Virgo uses rhetoric lauding authority/submission marriages, her practical illustrations show that marital happiness comes more frequently through mutual concern, negotiation and giving over decision-making to God. Rhetorical notions of headship are undercut by practical manifestations of equality and mutuality; alongside traditional rhetoric sit echoes of feminist calls for mutuality and equality and the post-war/late-modern shift (its dating is debatable) to 'companionate' marriage.

Marriage at Westside

Despite these complex, sometimes contradictory, interpretations, the authority/submission dualism shows no signs of being challenged in public NFI discourse. However, participant observation and interview research at Westside demonstrate more discordant ideas and practices. As Brasher (1998: 133) found when studying two American evangelical churches, 'While the patterns of congregational life and the texts in congregational bookstores set out clear, stringent ideals of gender and family life, the actual behaviors of real believers…present a much messier picture.'

Some discussion about marriage occurred during Westside house groups, but less than the strength of NFI ideology would predict. Marriage was instead a taken-for-granted feature of church life. As I demonstrate in Chapter 8, marriage is regarded as something that everyone desires and most will embark upon. It signifies adulthood and maturity. It also brings different requirements for women and men. For example, when NFI women marry, they adopt the designation 'Mrs' and take their husband's surname. Not only this, but when a married couple are referred to the man is listed first. Sarah and Chris were never referred to as 'Sarah and Chris', but always 'Chris and Sarah'. While these practices often remain in contemporary Britain, they are just about uniform within NFI.

Very soon after I met Sarah and Chris, Chris invited me for Sunday lunch at their house. After we had eaten, they showed me their wedding video. The video began with scenes from the 'stag night' of Chris and Tony, a friend who was also getting married. It demonstrated an amalgam of conservative, gender-differentiated attitudes and challenges to them. According to my fieldnotes:

> Saw 'stag video' of Chris and Tony's 'bachelor pad' in which they pretended to be making a documentary about arranged marriages. Two men, whose faces were covered, pretended to be Chris and Tony's wives-to-be. They interviewed them about how they felt about their forthcoming arranged marriages ('how does it feel to be 15 and be marrying a man who's 72?'). Lots of 'male humour,' as they put it (e.g. Q: 'What's one of Chris's bad habits?' A: 'Scratching his bottom.' Q: 'Why?' A: 'Because it's so big.' Another is 'keeping lizards in his pants.')[176]
>
> During the film of the service Sarah pointed out a woman from [name of town] who'd led some of the service and spoken for about five minutes (she didn't do the main talk).
>
> Conversation between Chris and Sarah about how obeying works in their marriage. She pointed out how on the video she said 'Love, honour and submit to,' not 'Love, honour and obey'. She said '"obey" sounds like you can't disagree with them. With "submit to" you can disagree, but go with their final decision even if you don't agree with it.' Chris: 'When has that ever happened?' Sarah: 'It happens all the time. I can think of loads of examples.' Chris: 'But not on important issues. We agree on important issues.'

The stag night and wedding format were identifiably British. The mock documentary ridicules some Asian systems of arranged marriages, adoption of the hijab for women and large age gaps between partners.[177] Its implication is that Chris and Tony see their weddings as egalitarian: they are marrying women of their own age who do not have to cover their heads or have their spouses chosen by family members. Viewing the wedding service, Sarah appeared anxious to show me that although a man preached the sermon a woman had a speaking role. Further, she clarified her objection to using the term 'obey'; 'submit to', she said, leaves room for disagreement. This understanding of submission bears resemblance to Griffith's (1997, see earlier) third 'nuanced' interpretation, in which women retain the right to express disagreement, even if the husband has ultimate decision-making power.

'Do you think men and women should have different roles in the family and marriage? (If so, what should the differences be?)' I asked during the interviews. The majority – fourteen out of twenty – responded affirmatively. Of the remaining six, one responded in the negative, and the other five replied that it depended on the couple involved. Of the fourteen who favoured gender division within marriage, twelve located this division

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[176] Noel Heather (2000: 204-206) argues that 'toilet jokes' and 'laddish banter' are common in New Churches and represent attempts to appeal to youth culture. If this is so, it is to masculine youth culture. It seems to me that men employ this humour to appeal to1990s 'new laddish' masculinity and identify themselves as similarly masculine.

[177] It is hard to avoid seeing here ethnic stereotyping that bears little relation to the reality of Asian marriage.

primarily in marriage rather than in reproduction. Only two located it in motherhood or fatherhood. This is significant, for while Westside and NFI have much to say about ideological differences between motherhood and fatherhood (motherhood retains solid connections to 'maternal instinct' and full-time childcare, and fatherhood to provision, authority and work-related absence, even as these conceptions are undercut by feminist influence), it is the husband-wife relationship which they class as the paramount setting for gender (difference) to be displayed. Given the central link between NFI's general theology and marital gender difference (see Chapter 4), Westside's approbation of gender-differentiated marriage is unsurprising. Not only did twelve of the interviewees favour gender division centred on marital 'roles', but there was also a slightly greater emphasis on men's responsibilities. This confirms my finding that NFI's marriage ideology focuses more on male headship than female submission.

Emma's was the most conservative view. Emma explained that while she would not insist on women staying at home to care for their children full-time, she was convinced differentiated marital roles were important:

> I do think that in a marriage… I think that the man should have the ultimate say, and I think that the man should be the head of the household um, and that any decisions, big decisions with regard to the family, that they should be met by the man.

The husband's role is having the last word or 'ultimate say', being 'head of the household' and making 'big decisions' concerning the family. Chris had a similar view, emphasising his 'responsibility' to 'protect', 'look after' and 'provide for' his wife and children:

> I, I feel that ultimately I'm the head of the, the household. But I don't say that in a, in a, in a way that I enjoy kind of lording it over my wife and family. I think, you know, I think it's ultimately it is a male thing to be kind of head of the family and er, and I think I think there is a degree, there is some scriptural basis for that, I think around things like, you know…it talks about submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ and then 'wives submit to your husbands.' But having said that, so I do think there's a, you know, the guy is ultimately the head of the family, but having said that I can't ever think of a situation in my marriage where I've had to say 'this is what I think and you've got to do it' kind of thing but there's been, there's always been enough of a kind of me listening to Sarah and um me valuing her, her opinion and that kind of thing so there's never been a, a, a time where I've almost had to, if you like, pull rank on her, um. Having said that I do, I carry with me the weight, I feel like I carry the weight of responsibility for my family.

His hesitance is considerable. He qualifies his beliefs by stressing his additional commitment to equality, mutual submission and listening to his wife. In his version (a little different from Sarah's comments after we viewed their wedding video) headship (decision-making that counters his wife's opinions) has never operated in his marriage.

In her interview Sarah described headship as leadership, but added that women should 'speak up' and give their opinions to their husbands. She starts hesitantly, mindful of (feminist?) critiques of male-led marriage.

> I think to work in a unit there has to be a clear leader and I think when you, when you both try to be the leader then that is, then it doesn't work and, and it causes a lot of friction… I think that um, if you look at the Bible I think it does state that the husband should lead and I er, but within that I think um - I think that when you say that, the problem is that there's lots of connotations… Sometimes you can say something and it's almost like you don't really want to say that, what you want to do is explain what should be, because people have got preconceived ideas or there's pre-, you know, there's experience or whatever, that tells them what, what that means, and I don't think that that is necessarily right. What I do think is that if um, if the woman were to lead I think that the dynamic in the relationship would be very damaging to the man and…and it would be to the woman as well….
> *KA: Because that's not what God has said [obscured]?*
> …Maybe it is, maybe yes, God has put an order so therefore, you know. I suppose I would be thinking along a more psychological route…but maybe, maybe it is just that, you know, God has said that so that is it, and at the end of the day we don't understand everything…but I think as we submit to God there should be a freedom that comes, not an oppression… And I think… that for a husband to lead effectively a woman must, erm, must fulfil her duty in speaking up. So it's not actually just 'you, you lead, you make the decisions and I will submit, I will follow' – that, that is completely abdicating your part in the team – and I think it is very much to speak up and very much to give your opinion, your insight, your um your, where you've come from, your experience, whatever. If that's not followed the first time and, you know, then, then you know, ultimately you do submit and you support, but it's not 'submit, oh I don't want to, I give up', it's submitting in support and it's 'let's go,' you know, 'we'll go with you,' you know 'I, I'll support you in this', and then but also being prepared to say, you know, there's got to be an environment in a marriage where mistakes can be worked through. It's not 'you did it wrong, it's your fault, you spoke up and said this', you know, there's got to be, 'we will make mistakes together'... And just because one person's leading it doesn't mean to say it's all their fault or, or that it's, that they've got to get it perfect every time; although they have a higher chance of getting it right because they've got somebody else speaking up if they're prepared to speak up [obscured]. But I don't, you know, it's not an easy thing that happens, it takes a lot of time um, to, to listen to each other and to maintain um, you know, respect and, you know, practice respect in times when you can feel uptight.

For Sarah male leadership reduces conflict because it minimises disagreement. However, submission is not passive acquiescence but participation in the decisions her husband has made in consultation with her. Sarah does not consider marriage easy: its success depends upon 'mak[ing] mistakes together' and mutual commitment to communication, respect and taking responsibility.

Many who answered 'yes' to wanting different marital 'roles' then qualified or altered this. Often a kind of battle – certainly a tension – emerged between conservative and egalitarian gender ideals. Interviewees would assert the importance of gender-differentiated marital roles, but in the same sentence deny them, minimise them, render them symbolic rather than practical or, even, suggest practices that reversed the gender order they claimed to advocate. Stacey (1998: 118-119) illustrates this in her conversation with a church leader whose dual views led her to depict him as Bill # 1 and # 2, 'fundamentalist Bill' and his more egalitarian 'alter-ego'. While Bill # 2's statements were dogmatic, patriarchal and non-negotiable, each was countered and negotiated in conversation with Stacey by 'postfeminist' Bill # 1. Like Stacey's two Bills, there were two Marions in Westside:

> Marion # 1: I think that the husband has a spiritual authority in terms of the way he leads his wife. So I do agree with the whole thing of women obeying their husbands
> Marion # 2: But I think that you've always got to look at that in the context of God requiring the man to love his wife as Christ loves the church. So if the husband is doing that I think there's a safety for the woman in the way her husband is making decisions um and that in that everything should be discussed and as far as possible both parties should be able to agree…
> Marion # 1: I think that a father has sort of like an overall responsibility for the family's um welfare and for being the provider
> Marion # 2: and although he might not necessarily go out and be the breadwinner for the family…
> Marion # 1: he will have responsibility to see that is performed and done adequately.
> *KA: Right… that's interesting. So the mother could be the breadwinner?*
> Marion # 2: Yeah, but, but as long as that is discussed
> Marion # 1: and the actual, and the father has ultimate, sort of um, responsibility for that.

Marion endorses Emma's focus on the man 'making decisions,' adding that women should 'obey' their husbands. However, she emphasises that decisions should be 'discussed' together to find a consensus that removes the need for the man to make the decision; at once

she affirms and negates headship as an ideal. Furthermore, it is acceptable for the wife to be the main 'breadwinner' as long as her husband retains 'ultimate responsibility'. This represents a kind of symbolic headship: the man does not necessarily need to do anything to show that he is the head; he possesses 'responsibility' by virtue of his position as head. But Marion's remarks about 'responsibility' could be interpreted more actively, as if the husband is the captain steering the ship, allowing or directing his wife to become the breadwinner as he sees will benefit the family's functioning. She adds to Emma's three understandings of the husband's role another: the husband should spiritually lead his wife.

Although she appeared unsure, Lara utilised the notion of symbolic headship, considering it important that the man *appeared* to be making the decisions, even if his wife made them. Her use of 'I' may indicate that she is referring to her relationship with her boyfriend (who she married after my fieldwork was complete). If so, it is possible that this relationship convinced her that headship may not (or not always) be practically applicable to heterosexual couple relationships:

> For a Christian I believe they should be different, um, just the whole you know man in authority you know makes the decisions, maybe not but um [laughs] but think like that they're making decisions even though I am, you know [laughs]. So um, I think yeah it's just a much more, especially like with families and things as well, that they should be seen to, although equal in most ways but you know still seen to have some kind of…
> *KA: Kind of difference?*
> Yeah, it's not being totally sure what I'm talking about really, but… [laughs]

Ruth, who was in a non-cohabiting relationship, admitted being in a process of negotiation between what she saw in the biblical texts (male leadership) and what she herself thought (that relationships should be egalitarian):

> I think I'm kind of grappling with the idea of the role of the man and the woman, um. I think the Bible teaches that there is a difference, like the man should be the head of the family um, but I think on the other hand, they've got equal roles to respect, submitting to one another um, so yeah, and I'm still to be honest grappling with what, those kind of relations go. As far as I know there should be a lot of equality but the men should, you know, take the lead um, or the responsibility, I think [laughs].

Rachel answered my question about whether different marital roles were necessary in the affirmative. She explained, however, partially negating her affirmation, that she believed there was a 'sliding scale' of acceptable attitudes and practices ranging from 'traditional' interpretations of marriage where the wife took charge of the kitchen and the husband of the DIY to 'modern' ideals of equality where 'everyday roles…are dependent on the personalities involved.' She did not mention authority or submission, so I prompted 'what about submission and headship?' She was noticeably reluctant to discuss these notions, responding simply that she considered it often appropriate for women to take more of a 'hands-on sort of micro parenthood' role sorting out the 'nitty-gritties' of childcare; conversely, 'I think the role of the man is more to give stability, to give to provide security, to provide um, sort of just… provide stability and an environment where the family is safe and secure'.

Her husband Simon identified headship as a man's greater responsibility for the marriage's success. He felt this responsibility towards Rachel. Yet this did not mean he believed Rachel should fulfil a submissive or domestic role, he said. He spoke throughout of 'feeling our way round it', of couples practising marriage as they saw fit. Furthermore, like Marion's and Lara's notions of theoretical male leadership/responsibility coupled with practical equality or even female leadership, Simon admitted that though he carries 'responsibility' for the marriage, Rachel makes more financial and administrative decisions. In conclusion, he thinks they 'run a very equal ship,' contrasting his marriage with that of friends he sees as 'quite weird' because they operate a more 'traditional' division of task. Simon's response, like the others, demonstrates the postfeminist juxtaposition of separate spheres and feminist understandings of marriage.

Jane believed that wives should submit to their husbands' orders, but said headship equated to a husband's loving care for the wife, and that her own husband had only exercised headship once:

> How it works out, you know, this authority of the husband, in my own marriage it just hasn't been an issue. Just like once in eight years Mark's said something like 'you shouldn't go to work today, I'm telling you not to go to work today because you're ill' and in fact what he was doing was something that was immensely loving and in my best interests and that's how I saw it and took it. But at the same time I swallowed hard and thought 'I can't because I promised that I would, um, obey' and so my

marriage vows included this submission bit and I thought 'rubber hits the road, I've got to stay at home and pull out'.
KA: So that's the main thing?
Yeah, that was. How it gets worked out practically, I mean I can see all these biblical arguments but practically what it boils down to, this whole sort of submission of the woman doesn't seem to be an issue for me. I'm not living my life permanently feeling 'oh, what's Mark got to say about this? I've got to do what he says'.

In forming these interpretations Westside often juxtapose what they understand from the Bible (husbands should lead, wives should submit) with attention to its and their own culture in a way that leads to greater egalitarianism. This was also the case for Jane's husband Mark. Mark seemed to be minimising the gender subordination in the New International Version of the Bible's 'wives, submit to your husbands' (Eph. 5:24) by rephrasing it 'wives, respect your husbands' and stressing men being sacrificial by rephrasing 'husbands, love your wives' as 'husbands, lay your lives down for your wives':

> *KA: Do you think men and women should have different roles in the family?*
> Yes, yeah well definitely biblically. So you've got particularly the Ephesians passage but it's elsewhere in the New Testament as well. So some of the differences are made clear. Others aren't as clear as we'd hope. So the obvious dichotomy is 'husbands, lay your lives down for your wives' and 'wives, respect your husbands' but I'm sure there's no implication there that husbands aren't supposed to respect their wives and wives aren't prepared to lay their lives down for their husbands. So I think biblically there's a different flavour to the love there. There is an asymmetry but it's – I'm going to hedge with these questions – it's hard to be clear exactly how much of that comes out of fundamental biblical truth and how much is inferred from what was going on then culturally and what's going on now culturally. And the fact that we have a Christian subculture, particularly in America, doesn't help at all in terms of clarifying the issues.

The meanings of headship range far beyond Griffiths', Storkey's and Ingersoll's typologies. For some headship signifies husbands' prerogative in decision-making; others give this privilege only for important decisions, still others only if stalemate is reached. For some, headship requires men to lead the marriage; for others it involves a more amorphous sense of 'responsibility' that does not translate into 'role' differences. Some advocate what Gallagher (2003) calls 'symbolic traditionalism' that operates alongside 'pragmatic egalitarianism'. A few take this further, allowing what looks like female control as long as men are proclaimed the leaders. Others relate headship only to differential parenting

activities. Still others advocate a sacrificial headship that negates (or nearly negates) any authoritarian aspects; the most egalitarian of these refer instead to 'mutual submission'. Headship is an immensely flexible concept that is moulded, in postfeminist fashion, to produce simultaneously conservative *and* feminist interpretations.

Furthermore, a third of Westside dispense with authority and submission, basing any differences in marital roles on individuals' 'personalities'. Sometimes their conceptions of 'personality' are based on gender stereotypes or women's childbearing activities so do not equate to entirely egalitarian practices, but at other times stereotypes are absent:

> I think family and marriage is something where you do have to commit to each other and there are certain things that perhaps a male is better at and things a female is better at and I think as a couple you need to work out what your strengths and weaknesses are and play on that. I mean I do feel that, er, a fatherly figure is definitely a, a big must when it comes to children, for security, and perhaps the mother figure is the one who's more sympathetic. I do not feel that the man should go off and work and the woman should stay in the house. I think that each couple's different and it should be a two-way thing. (Imogen)

> I think you can have different roles in a marriage, but I don't think it needs to be generally a different role, so I don't think you need to say 'all women should do X' in a marriage and 'all men should do X' in a marriage
> *KA: So you mean you could be married and you could do the laundry and your husband could do the cooking?*
> Yeah, or, yeah, because it's stupid if you're both trying to do everything the same. But, but I think they work best, or the ones I've seen work best, when people assume or they find their natural what they like doing best in a marriage. So that could mean, um, that if, if the, um, wife wants to go and work after she's had her baby, that she does while her husband stays at home and I've seen that happen as well. But it could mean the opposite as well. (Dawn)

> No. I think roles should be according to individual preference and appropriateness. (Jenny)

Such attitudes, along with the emphasis even of more conservative interviewees, demonstrate an ideal of intimacy and companionship worked out through negotiating ways of fulfilling the responsibilities of work and home in accordance with 'natural' inclination and personal choice. Although some Westside members are reluctant to 'own up' to believing this, preferring to stress adherence to NFI's public belief in male headship, support for equality is

likely stronger, more heartfelt, than the ideology of headship they notionally support as biblical.

Chapter 7

Masculinity

Introduction

Attention to men as gendered actors and to the construction of masculinities joined feminist scholars' focus on women and their often-unequal relation to men from around the late 1980s. Scholars of gender and evangelicalism have also begun investigating men and masculinity. However, such studies are almost exclusively American. British work on evangelical masculinity is historical, like Walker's 1991 work on the Salvation Army and Brown's 2001 investigation of the discursive construction of men as irreligious since 1800. A clutch of sociological studies address the American evangelical Promise Keepers movement, which began in the early 1990s and grew at an incredible rate, attracting up to a million men at rallies in 1995 (Balmer 2000). While early, feminist, work understood Promise Keepers as a patriarchal organisation (Messner 1997: 16-35), recent research reveals a mixture of patriarchy and feminist insights. Focusing mainly on married men's roles at home and work Lundskow (2000), Cole (2000) and Bartkowski's (2000) ethnographic work shows how Promise Keepers fuses traditional and egalitarian understandings of masculinity, while Lockhart (2000) detects four approaches to household gender differentiation: 'traditionalist', 'psychological archetypes' (linked to the mythopoetic men's movement), 'biblical feminist' and 'practical counselling.' Some of this research observes that evangelical men repudiate homosexuality in favour of faithful marital sex, while sometimes advocating a desexualised homosociality (Bartkowski 2000). Bartkowski has also co-authored an article which notes the dual fathering discourses in popular evangelical literature of 'distant patriarchs' and 'expressive dads'. Bartkowski and Xu (2000) show that in practice the latter weighs out since evangelical fathers rank higher than non-evangelical fathers in 'parental supervision and affective parenting'.

For NFI masculinity is a central arena where not only gender but also their identity as a movement is displayed. NFI are located within a backlash against feminism in Britain, a feature of which was to give new attention to men, who, it was argued, had been neglected in feminism discourse. At its foundation in the 1970s and again as part of the recent backlash against evangelical feminism, NFI concentrated on 'restoring' masculinity to what they considered God's ideal. I heard two passages (below), from writings by John Piper (co-editor of backlash text *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*) and evangelical psychiatrist John White, recounted several times as I read NFI's books and magazines, listened to their sermons and talked with their members and leaders. A third which I also consider key to NFI's view of masculinity comes from a talk by NFI's David Holden in a men's seminar:

> If I were to put my finger on one devastating sin today, it would not be the so-called women's movement, but lack of spiritual leadership by men at home and in the church. Satan has achieved an amazing tactical victory by disseminating the notion that the summons for male leadership is born of pride and fallenness, when in fact pride is precisely what prevents spiritual leadership. The spiritual aimlessness and weakness and lethargy and loss of nerve among men is the major issue, not the upsurge of interest in women's ministries. (Piper 1991a: 53)

> Men and women need one another *as* men and women. They need real men and women, *healed* men and women. And the day has come for manliness and womanliness to be restored. Yet I shall talk more about manliness than about womanliness. Why? Because I believe that when men are men, women will find much less difficulty entering into their own identity. (cited in Devenish 2000: 276)

> I think the crisis we're facing, not only in the church but also in society at the moment – and there are more and more sort of articles now coming out, because the pendulum swings, doesn't it, so there's more coming out saying 'What about us guys? What's our role? What's a father? What is it to be taking leadership? Do we have any role at all? Are we obsolete, dinosaurs?'…Because actually the crying need it seems to me in a lot of people, men particularly, is we need to have these issues addressed as well…The whole issue addressing the role of women and femininity is absolutely right and it's been brilliant that the last three decades of the last century, in the church as well as society, have done that and I applaud all of that…but how much has been neglected in the process? As I travel around talking to men about their role, how to be a good father, how to be a good husband…it's like 'well, I've never heard anything about it, I've never read anything about it, I've never heard anyone preach on that before.' Because in our desire to align ourselves with one need we've often neglected the other as well. (D. Holden 2000)

These passages, though they pay lip service to feminism, represent a backlash 'pendulum swing' away from women and towards masculinity.

While NFI and Westside's discussions of masculinity encompassed many themes – the husband's role, work, fatherhood, sport, sexuality, the uneasy relationship between masculinity and religion – two predominated: fatherhood and sexuality. It is these that this chapter explores. I define contemporary British notions of each as postfeminist – in other words as a late-modern amalgam of separate spheres, feminist and backlash discourses – before examining how NFI's treatment of each may be understood as postfeminist.

Fatherhood

Separate spheres fatherhood

Under nineteenth-century separate spheres discourse, three dominant concepts associated with fatherhood were authority, the breadwinner role and absence. The ideology of paternal authority, or patriarchy, and its effects on social practices of fatherhood (these do not always or exactly coincide), began developing from around the sixteenth century, due partly to the spread of Protestantism and its sacralisation of the family and male authority (Stone 1979). According to Ariès (1962: 356), married women's authority at home began declining in the fourteenth century; in the sixteenth century fathers were given legal authority over their wives and children (Stone 1979: 136). The increasingly child-centred, self-contained family unit shored up the ties within it, including the father's authority (Stone 1979). Fathers were framed in Enlightenment thought as rational agents (Seidler 1988), their authority connected to control of material resources including property and income and aided by 'a wide range of laws, religious symbols, metaphorical hierarchies and social practices' (Davidoff et al. 1999: 136). Until feminist challenges of the second half of the nineteenth century, fathers' legal authority gave them automatic custody of their children after divorce. Fathers were seen as benevolent patriarchs, responsible for protecting and disciplining children (Davidoff et al. 1999: 135-157) and 'giving away' daughters who married (Coppock et al. 1995: 20). Prevalent Christian ideals considered the father God's representative within the family (Davidoff & Hall 1987: 329-335).

The concept that it was fathers' responsibility to provide financially for their families was most salient within the gendered separation of work and home at modernity (Charles 2002: 77). The centrality of work to masculine identity – which increased through the nineteenth century (Davidoff & Hall 1987) – combined with the father's legal authority as head of house to position women and children as his economic dependents. Their dependence conferred upon men a leadership function. The extent to which the ideological construction of fathers as breadwinners was practiced differed by class. Middle-class fathers, whose masculine identity and income was bolstered by ownership of property and liquid capital, could support their families on a breadwinner's wage; this was so particularly from the rise of the 'family wage' (to which employed women were not entitled) from the late nineteenth century. Working-class fathers were less able to support a whole family, rendering women's paid employment necessary, though it was rarely desirable (Seccombe 1993). Class differences in employment produced different ideological emphases about masculinity: while Victorian working-class masculinity was linked to aggression, strength and courage, for middle-class men rationality and patronage were stressed (Day 1990: 53). For all men, masculinity was associated with the breadwinner role and the public/private division of labour.

The portrayal of fathers as authoritative providers whose presence was crucial to family well-being was counterbalanced by the reality that fathers were often absent. War and national service in the twentieth century absented men from their homes. Furthermore, fathers were absent not in spite of but because of breadwinner ideology (Seidler 1988); this will be returned to shortly. The Victorian patriarch may have been more myth or symbol than reality (Sandoff 1982: 4-6), perhaps because the man's absence from the home prevented his full exercise of authority.

Feminist fatherhood

Feminists of the second wave challenged separate spheres' promotion of maternal instinct and full-time motherhood. They suggested increasing men's practical and emotional involvement in childcare and removing distinct male and female parenting roles would help remedy women's social subordination (Wortis 1972; Gordon 1990: 149). Men involved in anti-sexist men's groups agitated for involved, not authoritarian or absent, fatherhood (Hearn

1987: 166-176; Seidler 1988; Segal 1990: 284). One such writer, Jeff Hearn, suggests that fatherhood, insofar as it is a hierarchical 'structured relation' (1987: 158) between men and their children, is necessarily oppressive (although individual fathers may not be). Instead, given that fatherhood often segregates men from children, men should cultivate caring friendships with children, not only those to whom they are biologically related (Hearn 1983; Hearn 1987: 151-159). In his account of feminist fathering, Isaac Balbus (1998) describes himself as 'mothering' his daughter. These calls for feminist fathering produced for a brief period in the early 1980s not only an anti-sexist 'new man', but also a 'new father', who 'is present at the birth', 'is involved with his children as infants, not just when they are older', 'participates in the actual day-to-day work of child care, and not just play' and 'is involved with his daughters as well as his sons' (Pleck 1987: 93).

Yet not only has the extent to which cultural representations of new manhood and fatherhood corresponded to reality been questioned (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill 2003: 50-53), but it is also argued, especially by socialist feminists, that the liberal feminist ideal of equality in childcare is hardly possible within structural constraints of the economy and workplace (inflexible career structures, hours and places of work, lack of affordable and available childcare and women's lower pay). Thus before fathers can take on joint nurturing roles, the structures must change. Lynne Segal (1990: 58; see also 26-59, 308-9, 319 and Rowbotham 1989: 123-142) points to the need to remove the public/private division, increase collective responsibility for the needs of individuals and ensure 'maximum choices for those caring and those being cared for alike'.

Radical feminists concerned about women and children's experience of men's violence in the family sought to decrease, not increase, these fathers' involvement. In 1975 the National Women's Aid Federation formed with dozens of local groups establishing hostels for women escaping violent partners (Bruley 1999: 153). Women's Aid has become one of the most respected and permanent products of the women's liberation movement (Coote & Campbell 1982: 37). Similarly, the new awareness of child sexual abuse from the late 1970s is attributable to feminist work (Segal 1990: 258).

Liberalisation of divorce laws through the 1969 Divorce Law Reform Act and the 1970 Matrimonial Proceedings and Property Act increased women's ability to leave violent and unhappy marriages and access economic resources after divorce (Hall 2000: 175-176). After divorce during the 1970s, the state tended increasingly to award custody to the parent

whose childcare responsibilities had been greater (Segal 1990: 50), who was generally the mother. Feminists often supported single and lesbian parenthood (Bryson 1999: 130; Hanscombe & Forster 1982); some questioned the need (other than for reproduction) for fathers.

Backlash fatherhood

A flight from equality in childcare towards a restoration of a breadwinning father occurred in the backlash period. State, media and 'fathers' rights' discourse claimed to solve – though arguably also discursively created – a 'crisis' of uncertain and unstable masculinity. Right-wing commentators, notably 'underclass' theorist Charles Murray (1990, 1996; Dennis & Erdos 1992) pointed to father-absence and illegitimacy as the major reason for a perceived growing crisis involving young men, unemployment and urban crime, citing single mothers' independence as the cause (rather than, more plausibly, the product) of father-absence (Campbell 1993: 302-324).

Other manifestations of the backlash were fathers' rights groups like Families Need Fathers and Dads After Divorce (and recently, Fathers 4 Justice), who appeared from the mid 1970s claiming that feminists' focus on women's rights led to men's being ignored (Whelehan 2000: 121-122). They pushed for joint custody and equal decision-making responsibility after divorce even if the child resided with its mother and argued that retaining contact with the father was best for the child, even if the father had previously been violent (Segal 1990: 53).

As Thatcher and Major's New Right governments promoted breadwinner fatherhood, a 'moral panic' vilified single mothers (Mann & Roseneil 1999) and absent fathers as epitomising troubled parenting. A state discourse about 'feckless fathers' (Westwood 1996) or 'Deadbeat Dads' (Bradshaw et al. 1999) who became absent after relationship breakdown emerged from a government concerned that, as well as producing inadequately brought-up children, father absence increased the government's financial burden, forcing it to act as surrogate breadwinner father. This concern had its basis in the rapid increase in non-resident fathers during the 1980s and 1990s[178] because of more births outside marriage, a breakdown

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[178] Mitchell & Goody (1997: 214) suggest lone mother families more than doubled between 1971 and 1991.

in the relationships between unmarried cohabiting couples with children, and separation or divorce of married couples with children (Bradshaw et al. 1999: 1-2).

Wanting to reduce expenditure, in the wake of the 1991 Child Support Act the government created the Child Support Agency to force non-resident fathers to support their children financially (Bradshaw et al. 1998, 1999). As Carol Smart (1997; see also Collier 1999) argues, three pieces of legislation (the Children Act, the Child Support Act and the Family Law Act 1996) shored up the 'traditional' family. Fathers were required to be economically responsible for their first family and have joint accountability for parenting after divorce; this represented a new assumption that shared parenting was best for the child (Bradshaw et al. 1999: 225).

This fatherhood discourse can be read as a backlash against feminist critiques of fatherhood and the nuclear family and as a fear of women's increasing autonomy. Feminists demonstrate that research points to the lack of a father's income rather than the lack of a father being particularly detrimental to children in single parent families (Mitchell & Goody 1997). They also point out that for men to claim equal parenting rights after relationship breakdown is unjust, given that before relationship breakdown in two-parent heterosexual families women are generally the main child carers since economic structures and state policy inhibits joint parenting (Collier 1999: 52; Brophy 1989: 228). Moreover, 'father absence' discourse signifies the dismantling of the welfare state and the notion of collective social responsibility for children (Segal 1990: 50-55). It represents 'anxiety…about the separation of marriage and parenthood' (Lewis 2002: 130), a return to the separate spheres notions of fathers as necessarily *authoritative* (leading their family and disciplining their children),[179] *breadwinners* and *absent*. Fathers' absence, though, remains a corollary of their breadwinner role (Collier 1995: 203-4; Bradshaw et al. 1999: 1).

Postfeminist fatherhood

Contemporary Britain, amalgamating separate spheres, feminist and backlash notions of fatherhood, exhibits a postfeminist tension or contradiction (Hearn 2002), sociologists often note, though without the term 'postfeminist'. Frank Furstenberg (1988) examines the

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[179] Miriam David (1986: 139) argues that the Victorian 'paterfamilias' 'remains implicit' in the New Right view of fatherhood.

'good dad-bad dad' dichotomy in late 1980s American discourses and practices of fatherhood. Feminist notions of nurturing, involved fathering are upheld and mirrored somewhat socially by slightly increased male participation in domestic labour, yet they coexist with images of 'deadbeat dads' refusing to share parenting. Furstenberg suggests that the discourses that create this dualism are present in fathers' everyday lives. For instance, while many men are now more involved during childbirth, supporting their female partners in the delivery room in a way that would have been unheard of in the nineteenth century, they are also more absent – as rates of relationship breakdown have increased many men are less involved in their children's lives (Coltrane 1995; Marsiglio 1995).

Deborah Lupton and Lesley Barclay highlight the 'paradoxes and tensions' within meanings of fatherhood that affect fathering in the contemporary West. The central tension they name corresponds to my notion of postfeminist fatherhood. They write:

> Fatherhood…is commonly portrayed as a major opportunity for modern men to express their nurturing feelings in ways that their own fathers supposedly did not, and to take on an equal role in parenting with their female partners. This is the archetype of the 'new' father which, many argue, is changing family lives and challenging traditional notions of masculinity…This 'new' father archetype, however, is only one of the dominant notions circulating in relation to how men are expected to fashion and present themselves. Men are generally still expected to participate fully in the economic sphere, to act as providers for their families, and are encouraged to construct their self-identities as masculine subjects through their work role. (Lupton & Barclay 1997: 1-2)

While men appropriate liberal feminist notions of involved fatherhood, they also remain located within notions of fatherhood as breadwinning and thus partially absent. This tension is exemplified by differential parental leave policies that assume and enable women to be primary carers (Collinson 2001). Richard Collier (1999: 49) argues similarly as regards parenting post-relationship breakdown that 'There is…a fundamental paradox at the heart of the "new fatherhood" ideology.' He suggests that the 'values of autonomy, control and separateness though which cultural understandings of the "masculine" continue to be made sit most uneasily with the qualities of the "everyday" nurturing and sacrifice implicit in the "new fatherhood" ideology.'

Postfeminist fatherhood in NFI

Fatherhood in public NFI discourse

Leaders in NFI perceive father absence as a primary social problem. Two Stoneleigh Bible Week talks illustrate this.[180] In the second seminar of a series on masculinity at Stoneleigh 2000, entitled 'In the Home', David Holden argues that fathers' involvement in their homes is central to 'true manhood'. He believes society is 'at loggerheads' with the Bible: 'our culture seems to be saying that this is somewhat archaic, this idea of a man in the home who takes responsibility and maybe takes some form of leadership.' As society has rejected and neglected fatherhood, as fathers have become passive and distracted, 'suffering' has resulted. Undefined, absent, 'emasculated' fathers are unacceptable above all because human fatherhood is designed to reflect God's fatherhood:

> The very root of society, of what we are, is being undermined because nobody's taking responsibility. The whole point was: I am a reflection of the father-heart of God…That's why he created families where our heavenly father could be displayed through earthly fathers. And for us when we become absent – you know what I mean by that: you can be in your home and yet be an absent father because you're not taking the responsibility of true fatherhood. So when I'm tired and I'm fed up and I think 'oh I just wanna have some quiet time, I just wanna get away from everything'… something inside me says 'now come on, if you do that you are not reflecting God's fatherhood'. Because God's fatherhood – God's not like that with me…He doesn't say 'I'm too busy, I can't sort you out'…It's like when you discipline your children. You think 'I can't be bothered to bring a line…with my kids or discipline my children when they're younger'. Every time you do that you are undermining the very purpose of God's relationship with us. The Bible says 'God disciplines us for our good.' So every time I usurp that, I say 'my wife's good at that, my wife's good at that bit, in fact my wife's good at most things about parenting.' So many guys seem to think parenting's left to the wife. Raising the kids? 'Oh, that's my wife's interest.' Instructing them? 'That's what my wife does'. Disciplining them? 'That's what my wife does.' Loving them? 'That's what my wife does.' Being affectionate to them? 'That's what my wife does.' And every single one of those things it's the major responsibility of us as fathers to do…Why are there so many overbearing mothers today? I suggest to you that sometimes it is because of the neglect of the father. It's time to change. God never intended the father's role to be

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[180] Both bear strong similarities to Weldon Hardenbrook's (1991) essay 'Where's Dad?' in Piper and Grudem's (1991) key American text representing the backlash against evangelical feminism.

> taken over by the mother. It is part of the function, the responsibility of the man in the home. (D. Holden 2000)

At Stoneleigh 2001, Greg Haslam led a seminar on chapter four of the book of Malachi, basing upon it a passionate and poignant call for fathers to eschew passivity and absence and take a central role in their children's lives. Haslam believes that post-war Britain, like post-exilic Judah, rejected Christianity, with countless negative results he documents statistically: hopelessness, poverty, crime, violence against women, divorce, single parenthood and sexual experimentation. Haslam considers father absence the major cause of social disintegration in the West and 'evidence of a curse on our land.' Britain, he believes, needs revival: widespread return to faith in God that transforms social behaviour. This ethos dovetails with Thatcherite individualism; social change happens through individuals deciding to alter their behaviour, but within a prescribed framework.

What will bring this much-needed revival? Haslam asks rhetorically. His answer equates spiritual vitality and social reform with more active fatherhood:

> The Bible would give this simple answer to one of the greatest things we could see in our nation today: better fathers. Better fathers. Here it is in Malachi 4 verses 5-6: 'Behold, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.' Now that's a statement that will ring long in your ears once you have truly heard it. If you like, it's God's final word to a nation in crisis. And I want to ask 'What does it mean?' Well, at the very least it is clear that God views all of human social history primarily in familial terms. And says in words that actually would jar politically correct sensitivities today, that men, and particularly fathers, are critical to his designs and desires for our social welfare. There will be no peace on earth until men learn again what it really means to be a man, as God defines a man to be… This generation has been called the fatherless generation. And the loss of true fathers has had incalculable effects. (Haslam 2001)

A contradictory approach to gender that is arguably postfeminist is evident: men need to work at, 'learn', 'what it really means to be a man'. Haslam's statement represents an amalgamation of pre-feminist essentialism and feminist social constructionism. Along with essentialist thinkers he posits that there is an inner core of 'what it really means to be a man' that is created and defined by God. But whether 'how God defines a man to be' points to an essential, pre-existing 'nature' or a set of constructions to be assumed socially and

discursively is ambiguous. A more solid social constructionism is present in Haslam's call for men to 'learn' their masculinity. This postfeminist contradiction is also present in John White's comment 'When men are men, women will find much less difficulty entering into their own identity' (Devenish 1998: 35) and recurs in NFI's discussions of gender, especially in conjunction with masculinity.[181] Yet theirs is not a social constructionism that allows individuals to choose how they construct or evade gender; rather, its source is traditional authority, in the form of (their interpretation of) the Bible. Neither are they postmodernist constructionists. NFI are realists who understand gender constructions to involve embodied inhabitants of a material world. Moreover, the making of gender occurs not playfully but in all seriousness.

Haslam bases a 'wish list for better fathers' on his experience of rarely seeing his father since his parents' divorce when he was a child. Explaining his yearning for 'a father who'd talked to me', 'a father who'd affirmed me and supported me', 'a father who'd trained me and disciplined me' and 'a father who loved me,' he reveals how he believes his father's absence affected him:

> He wasn't there when I got 10 O levels and later 5 A levels. He didn't see me graduate. He didn't see me when I got my postgraduate certificate and became a teacher. He wasn't there when my first child was born, nor my second, nor my third. He didn't see me get married. And he wasn't there when I felt the call of God on my life to ministry at the age of 27. And he's never visited the church I've pastored for 21 years and he's only heard me preach one of the many thousands of sermons I've preached. And that was at the funeral of my older brother. Now fathers, I'm saying to you that you need to be there for your children. Because the thing I've missed most about my father is that he was never there to say 'well done son, I'm proud of you.' But a child needs to hear that with an ache deep in their bones.[182]

Haslam lists seven characteristics of good fathering: commitment; communication; generosity; teaching and guidance; affirmation and support; training and discipline; and love. Relating his lack of each, he encourages men to strive towards them, participating in their children's hobbies, hugging them, putting them to bed, praising them and encouraging them in their faith. Father-absence may be caused by divorce, over-dedication to the workplace or laziness. Yet for Haslam it is inexcusable; men must change.

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[181] I mention in Chapter 2 that NFI give more attention to (re)constructing masculinity than femininity.
[182] However, Haslam's educational, vocational, family and religious achievements seem to call into question his thesis that lack of a father produces negative outcomes.

Like separate spheres, Holden and Haslam's fatherhood discourse involves responsibility, authority, discipline and economic provision. Yet their additional emphasis on fatherly affection and participation in the daily tasks of nurture represents a feminist 'new' fatherhood that does not restrict childcare to women. Holden's commentary can also be located within the backlash, for he argues that mothers have taken an 'overbearing' parenting responsibility when men, to whom God has given primary parenting responsibility, have neglected it. However, while this can be understood as an anti-feminist argument, Holden and Haslam are also criticising men. Ehrenreich's (1983) argument that backlash calls for men to take responsibility may in fact be a reaction not against feminism but against a male revolt against the breadwinner ideal that occurred in the 1970s is plausible. But the reassertion of fatherhood still contains anti-feminist aspects. If, as Holden argues, 'every single one of those things' (including disciplining, loving, being affectionate, instructing children) is 'the major responsibility of us as fathers', women's importance is being minimised. Although NFI prefer *mothers* to stay at home with their young children, women are implicitly being told to take a backseat at parenting and that the 'childwork' (Hearn 1983) they do is of less importance than that done by their husbands. Women are thus constructed as passive and less significant than men. Like backlash 'underclass' theorists of father absence, NFI position mothers as unimportant compared with the indispensability of active fathers, on whose presence social health is seen to stand or fall. That this may occur despite or as a result of what appears to be feminist support for shared parenting has been noted by Jeff Hearn (1983, 1987: 151-159) in a non-religious context.

Holden and Haslam's discussions of father absence closely echo contemporary British backlash discourse. Like the Australian fathers Lupton and Barclay (1997: 144-145) studied, these middle-aged NFI leaders are the children of men their generation identifies as being particularly absent, whether or not correctly. Such men (see also Corneau 1991) articulate and apply to their own fathers this absent father discourse, criticising absence and choosing instead a slightly amorphous notion of 'being there' for their own children. Holden and Haslam's conception that they are constructing a 'biblical' fatherhood in contradistinction to the absent fatherhood favoured in contemporary Britain is inaccurate for two reasons. First, in the British social context father absence is rarely suggested as preferable, except by those (especially feminists) concerned about individual men who are

abusive to female partners or children. Second, Holden and Haslam's fatherhood ideal in fact closely resembles popular contemporary ideals.

Fatherhood at Westside

Westside's separate spheres conception of the father as provider and authority figure is joined, in postfeminist fashion, by notions of 'new' fatherhood. While Westside perceived women as more interested in children than men, they also argued that it was important for men to participate in their children's day-to-day nurture. Within group settings men occasionally made jokes distancing themselves from close association with children. One evening the group treated Harry and Ann's arrival with surprise: their daughter had just given birth and Westsiders expected them to be at the hospital. Harry said that he had not yet seen the baby, and commented 'when you've seen one baby, you've seen them all', to which someone replied: 'that's the sort of thing a man would say.' The women laughed, making disapproving noises to indicate that all babies were different and Harry's lack of attention to his grandchild was typically masculine. Similarly, when Jane told the group that her and Mark's child was teething and she wanted to soothe the pain with medicine, Mark commented: 'you should get a scalpel and open it up so it can come through properly.' While no one called this comment masculine, it can be read as an assertion of tough, unemotional masculine difference.

Westside's agreement with feminist thinking about fatherhood centres on the liberal feminist ideal of increasing men's involvement in nurturing their children. Westside encourage men to decide to give more time to their own children but do not consider socialist feminist arguments for the restructuring of work and home. This reflects what Gallagher (2003: 55) calls 'an evangelical penchant for advocating personal rather than structural solutions.' During one house group, Rachel read out an email she had received listing ways 'the devil stops us being effective.' One was the devil's tendency to make men 'give their whole lives to their careers', arriving home late and neglecting their families. While this hints at social structural issues – the linkage between masculinity and work, the temporal demands of the postindustrial capitalist economy – the conclusion that individual fathers must try not to stay too late at work is, like the structure it critiques, individualized (cf. Bauman 2001; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2001).

Despite Westside men's lesser connection with their children than their wives', the two men with young children took an active role in their upbringing. Mark and Jane told me that when their children wake at night, they take it in turns to get up. And while Jane's part-time job permits her to work during the evenings, making it convenient that she, rather than Mark, looks after their young children during the day, Mark is evidently involved in childcare and other domestic tasks. When Mark was offered a promotion, Jane commented that she did not want him to accept it if meant longer working hours: Mark currently gets home in time to give the children tea and help Jane put them to bed. Once Jane told me that friends of theirs had recently moved to a 'huge' house in the country. Their distance from the city where he now works requires him to leave at 5.15 each morning, which means 'he never sees his children.' While she did not question this man's adoption of a breadwinner role, she regarded the couple's move as 'ridiculous' because it was important for fathers to spend time with their children.

The other couple with children, Chris and Sarah, followed a similar pattern. Chris works full-time outside the home and Sarah, until the child's first birthday, stayed at home to care for her. Sarah then returned to work part-time. Chris makes sure that work does not take over his family life and refuses to stay at work beyond 5.30pm; given the tendency for those in his profession to work long hours, sticking to this decision is, he admitted, difficult, and does not always make him popular with his colleagues. On one occasion, Chris mentioned a book he was reading called *How to Really Love your Child* (Campbell 1995) and expressed agreement with the author's view that children should be shown unconditional love. Chris was evidently physically and emotionally attentive and affectionate towards his daughter.

The interplay of human and divine fatherhood

Although NFI anthropomorphise God by comparing God to human fathers (as David Holden's [2000] comment that God 'created families where our heavenly father could be displayed through earthly fathers' shows) they acknowledge that this can be problematic for those with deficient human fathers. In his book of Bible studies for recent Christian converts Terry Virgo (1999: 103) explains:

> Many people find it hard to relate to God as their Father. 'My earthly father treated me badly,' they think. 'I don't want to see God in the same role.' To protect themselves they 'play safe'. They accept with their minds that God loves them, but they refuse to let him get any closer.

Westside, too, acknowledged imperfect fathers as obstructing Christians' experiences of God as a loving father. During a house group talk she gave on obeying God, Ann explained: 'When we hear God we should obey him but sometimes we're scared of listening or obeying because we associate God with the experience of fatherhood we've had.' According to my fieldnotes:

> Ann says her father was strict and a disciplinarian. One day at the dinner table she wouldn't stop talking when he told her to and he threw a knife at her which cut her hand. She's always seen God like that, as a bit strict, as if he's got a big stick. Only in the last few years has she realised that God's not like that. She asks 'Does anyone else want to say anything about that?'
>
> Sarah says her father was absent in the sense that he was a workaholic who had ideals and wanted to be there for his children but couldn't because he was always working. She's never thought that God wants to spend time with her because of that.
>
> Simon's father gave him a sense of adventure and made him believe he could achieve anything, so therefore he's never had a problem with thinking he could have vision and do things for God, but he has had a problem with accepting God's affection and intimacy on a day-to-day basis as his father didn't show him that kind of tenderness.

Like Virgo (1999: 104-105), Westside believe that to resolve these problems Christians should envisage God as a perfect father, in contrast to human fathers.[183] During the prayer time after Ann's talk, Sarah gave a prophecy that 'for someone here it wasn't your father but your mother who was strong and the authority figure. God wants to challenge that person to see God as father; he wants you to know him as a *father.*'

Ann's rejection of her own father's strictness, violence and authoritarianism, Sarah of her father's work-generated absence and Simon of his father's lack of affection and intimacy signify approval of new, involved, tender fatherhood. Yet Sarah's insistence that the unnamed group member whose mother was strong and authoritative should instead associate

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[183] How far this is helpful is unclear. Alternative solutions, such as those provided by feminist theologians arguing for a conceptualisation of God as mother (e.g. McFague 1987; Mollenkott 1987) are not considered; in fact, they are often repudiated. See also my comments in Chapter 4 on the theological heterodoxy of conceptualising God as male.

those characteristics with God who is Father, demonstrates retention of elements of separate spheres fatherhood.

Male sexuality

Separate spheres male sexuality

R. W. Connell (1987, 1995), Máirtín Mac an Ghaill (1994) and Miguel Vale de Almeida (1996), among others, identify heterosexuality as central to the construction of acceptable masculinity within recent western history. Heterosexuality is particularly central to 'hegemonic masculinity', that 'particular variety of social masculinity that subordinates other varieties' (Vale de Almeida 1996: 59; hegemonic masculinity will be discussed shortly). Within the nineteenth century, the period most influenced by the ideology of separate spheres, sexuality was strongly gendered, classed and racialised (de Groot 1989). Medical advancements and the creation of scientific experts in sexuality – christened 'sexologists' in the early twentieth century (Ayto 1999: 48) – brought sexuality under increasing surveillance, regulation and recommendation (Foucault 1979), often through literature directed to a middle-class audience. While historians have challenged a dichotomous view of Victorian men's (lustful) and women's (passive) sexuality exemplified best in the pronouncements of mid-nineteenth-century physician William Acton,[184] there is sufficient evidence that notwithstanding the existence of divergent viewpoints, men more than women were widely regarded as possessing strong sexual desires needing containment through self-control; Seidler (1989) shows how the Enlightenment made self-control central to masculinity. Masturbation and nocturnal emissions were rejected as psychologically and physically unhealthy. Homosexual practice in the form of sodomy – a homosexual *identity* was not 'created' until the late nineteenth century (Foucault 1979: 42-43) – was severely legally sanctioned, especially in the early nineteenth century; until 1861 it was punishable by death. Lesbian sexuality was largely invisible (Weeks 1981a: 96-117, 1981b). Marriage was considered the ideal place for men's desires to be satisfied and contained. Yet the view that

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[184] See Marcus 1966, Gay 1984, Mendus & Rendall 1989, Maynard 1993 and Mason 1994 for the argument that sexual prudery was simply one in a number of Victorian discourses about sexuality. Hall (1991: 15-26) and Marcus (1966: 1-33) discuss Acton's beliefs.

men were highly sexually motivated sat uneasily with the notion that (middle-class) wives were relatively sexually disinterested, and the sexual double standard led to some condonation of men's infidelity with working-class prostitutes or mistresses who, unlike 'chaste' married women, were considered unhealthily desirous (Weeks 1981a; Hollway 1984; Mendus & Rendall 1989; Hall 1991: 15-39; Hall 2000: 10-29).

Feminist male sexuality

Feminists from the nineteenth century critiqued this sexual 'double standard'. Josephine Butler campaigned against the 'great injustice' of the 1860s Contagious Diseases Acts which required women suspected of working in prostitution to be examined for venereal disease but left men unexamined and unblamed (Roberts 1995: xiv-xv). For Christabel Pankhurt, high rates of venereal disease exacerbated through prostitution rendered male chastity as urgent a need as women's suffrage (Weeks 1981a: 160-175). Second-wave feminists also considered sexuality enmeshed in women's subordination (Jackson & Scott 1996). Some, like Marie Stopes earlier in the twentieth century (Hall 1991), argued that women's access to sexual pleasure was restricted by lack of access to contraception and abortion and ignorance about their capacity for sexual enjoyment (Koedt 1972; Meulenbelt 1981). Pro-feminist men critiqued patterns of male sexuality as based on performance, penis- and orgasm-centred, depersonalised, based on dominance over women, and yet suffused with hidden fear (Metcalf & Humphries 1985). Gay anti-sexist men sought alliances with feminists (Edwards 1994).

Others, less reformist than radical, accused twentieth-century sexologists and the ideals of the 1960s 'sexual revolution' of supporting features of male sexuality that were 'particularly damaging to women' (notably those involving violence) (Coveney et al. 1984: 10). These features signalled a counterattack on first-wave feminist critiques, they argued. They claimed that instead of enhancing women's sexual freedom, sexual revolutionaries encouraged women to engage in sexual practices defined and directed by men. Radical feminists revealed and condemned the most negative manifestations of male sexual dominance, namely sexual violence against women (Kelly 1988). They formed the organisation Women Against Violence Against Women, which like analyses by Dworkin (1981) and Brownmiller (1975), saw male sexual violence in forms such as rape and

pornography as a major site of women's oppression. While some feminists felt that it was possible to positively reform heterosexuality, others felt lesbianism provided a better solution (Johnston 1974; Rich 1980; Onlywomen Press 1981).

Backlash male sexuality

From the 1980s separate spheres notions of male sexuality were reasserted. A moral panic about HIV and AIDS led to suspicion of male homosexuality (Holland et al. 1998). The Conservative government upheld the nuclear family as a superior living arrangement, in 1988 introducing Section 28, an amendment to the Local Government Act preventing local authority schools from teaching the 'acceptability' of homosexuality as a 'pretended family relationship' (Durham 1991: 111-118). Heterosexuality, especially in its marital form, was treated as normative. And while New Right moral pressure groups like CARE and NVALA shared radical feminists' hostility to pornography (Durham 1991: 97-98; Segal & McIntosh 1992; Maitland 1992), their opposition focused less on fears about women's exploitation than on the threat they believed pornography posed to the family and childhood innocence. Thus feminism's critique of male sexuality was minimised. Furthermore, while state acknowledgement of sexual violence against women increased, little changed practically for women as funding for support for women victims continued to be insufficient (Kelly 1988: 233-238) and Victorian ideas regarding gender and sexuality hampered more than a tiny minority (far below 10%) of reported sexual and domestic assaults resulting in a conviction (Gregory & Lees 1999).

The essentialist view of men's sexual desires as strong, irrepressible and penetration-focused was endorsed within popular and legal discourse around rape (Kelly 1988) and popular culture. In the 1990s men's magazines *Loaded* and *FHM* and TV sitcom *Men Behaving Badly* were launched, marketed to (imaginary?) 'new lads' whose interests included beer, curry, football and sex (or at least fantasising about it) (Whelehan 2000: 58-76). 'New laddism', a cross-class phenomenon, can be read as a defensive response to feminism, a 'reassertion of modified machismo' that takes its inspiration from the 1960s working-class 'gang of lads,' but is less aggressive, more appearance-conscious and slightly self-deprecating (O'Donnell & Sharpe 2000: 189). New laddism endorsed the notion that men were governed by strong 'natural' (hetero)sexual drives. Studies such as Holland et al.'s

demonstrate the way this discourse of men as 'active, desiring agents' (1998: 67) dictates the form of heterosexual relationships, producing for young women unsatisfactory and risk-laden sexual experiences in which they lack power to negotiate condom use. New laddism has been accompanied, especially since the birth of the internet, by a profusion of pornographic material, a growing sex industry depicting women as products to be purchased by a male consumer which, many argue, has gained in public acceptability (Marriott 2003).

Postfeminist male sexuality

But this backlash does not just signify dismissal of feminism, for feminist concerns are often incorporated within contemporary (sometimes backlash) discourse. *Loaded* magazine's tag line 'for men who should know better' incorporates a feminist understanding that objectification of women's bodies must occur with an apologetic nod to more knowing (feminist) views of male sexuality. Similarly, although heterosexuality and marriage have been reasserted, media representations of non-marital, non-monogamous and non-heterosexual encounters have continued increasing, along with growing public acceptance of such images (Hill & Thomson 2000) and of some of the social behaviours to which they allude (Park 2000: 7). And while domestic violence remains prevalent, its prominence on policy agendas has increased. Postfeminist men, therefore, draw on both separate spheres and feminist understandings in making their sexualities. In the mid 1980s Wendy Hollway (1984) pointed to the existence of three coexisting and potentially contradictory discourses of sexuality: the male sexual drive discourse (men constantly desire sexual gratification), the have/hold discourse (sex should take place within a committed partnership) and the permissive discourse (sexuality is a natural drive for all individuals and should not be confined to committed partnerships). Similarly, I argue that separate spheres and feminist discourses of sexuality exist in contemporary Britain, sometimes simultaneously.

Postfeminist male sexuality in NFI

Male sexuality in public NFI discourse

NFI's discussions of sex and sexuality centre on men's sexuality. Male sexuality is a recurring theme in conversations, sermons and writings. Like fatherhood it is problematic: men's failure to conform to what NFI consider 'biblical' sexual practice renders sexuality a prominent, anxiety-provoking area in which undesirable manifestations of masculinity are exhibited. NFI leaders publicly pronounce all non-marital genital sexual activities as sinful: sinful male sexuality includes pre- and extra-marital heterosexual sex, homosexual sex, prostitution, masturbation and using pornography. NFI believe that unchecked, men's sexual desires are likely to lead them astray; that married men tend selfishly to put their sexual fulfilment before their wives'; that teenage boys are likely to have sex before marriage and be promiscuous; and that all men gravitate towards pornography and masturbation. Yet this does not mean NFI are 'anti-sex'; indeed, they believe mutually fulfilling sex is crucial to marriage (Wilthew 1991: 105-118; Holden 2000).

Leader David Devenish's book on spiritual warfare[185] *Demolishing Strongholds* outlines areas of temptation and demonic control by which Christians can be 'bound'. One is sexual. 'We are living in a society that is saturated with sexual symbols, where sex is used as a tool for control and where people are being undermined by the evil principalities that have a powerful hold over their lives through sex', he argues. 'Our society has again given itself over to the worship of false idols and the battle for sexual purity is not just an issue that needs dealing with in our personal lives; it is also a major issue of spiritual warfare' (2000: 145). Many (all examples given are of men) need to be 'released from pornography' (2000: 144), as some do from 'auto-sexuality' ('sex with oneself solely for self-gratification') (2000: 148). Furthermore, homosexual and lesbian 'acts' are 'sinful' and same-sex attraction generally results from past, especially childhood, trauma (2000: 149-150). Terry Virgo is similarly negative about non-marital, non-heterosexual sex. People search for freedom through 'sleep[ing] around' and having homosexual relationships, he writes, but homosexuals, who 'change partners much more than heterosexuals,' discover through sex not freedom but diseases like AIDS (T. Virgo 1990: 108).

NFI's notions of male sexuality closely resemble English Victorians'. Both regard men as possessing strong sexual desires that need containing within marriage. Other sexual

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[185] 'Spiritual warfare' refers to a spiritual battle NFI believe Christians are engaged in against Satan and other demons. Devenish (2000: 24) defines spiritual warfare as: 'The reality that the advance of the gospel and the building of the church involves us in attacking and experiencing counter-attack in relation to real cosmic forces of darkness under the control of Satan who is also described as the god of this world.'

activities are outlawed, then demonised or pathologised – Devenish does the former in arguing that non-marital sex has demonic links; both do the latter by equating homosexuality with AIDS or childhood trauma. This equation of same-sex sexuality with men rather than women conforms to the greater attention given in the Victorian period to male homosexuality than lesbianism.

At the first leaders' Prayer and Fasting gathering I attended, a talk was given by an NFI member working for the moral lobby group CARE (formerly the Festival of Light) about Section 28, which Parliament was debating repealing. CARE's accompanying leaflet, produced jointly with the Evangelical Alliance, entitled *Section 28: Now is the time to make your voice heard*, expressed on its front page the commitments: 'Protecting Children. Protecting Innocence. Protecting the Family.' It urged writing to MPs to protest against Section 28's proposed abolition. It also expressed opposition to the lowering of the homosexual age of consent from eighteen to sixteen (Evangelical Alliance & CARE 2000). In its alliances with these New Right activities, NFI is situated within the anti-feminist backlash.

Homosexuality at Westside

Although NFI's normative discussions about homosexuality derive from separate spheres or the backlash, Westside presented a more nuanced view. While rejecting homosexuality played an important part in their construction of masculinity, they occasionally reached towards a more liberal, feminist conception.

One evening, Jeremy Marks, the founder of Courage, an evangelical organisation providing support to gay people, came on Chris' invitation to speak to Westside about 'how to understand the gay person's perspective'. For Chris to make this request demonstrates greater progressiveness than would be found in some NFI churches, for whom the 'gay person's perspective' might not be considered a priority.

Marks started Courage in 1988, he explained. Previously involved in gay relationships, he had come to believe that homosexual sex was sinful and could be 'healed' through close non-sexual same-sex friendships. In accordance with mainstream evangelical thinking Marks set up 'discipleship programmes' to help people relinquish homosexuality. Giving statistics about the incidence of homosexuality, he refuted the suggestion that

homosexuality is genetic, giving instead an interpretation drawn from psychologist Elizabeth Moberly (1983a, 1983b), a well-known advocate of 'gender affirmative therapy'. Moberly (1983b: back cover) argues that 'the homosexual condition involves legitimate developmental needs, the fulfilment of which has been blocked by an underlying ambivalence to members of the same sex'. 'The homosexual – whether man or woman – has suffered from some deficit in the relationship with the parent *of the same sex*', and 'there is a corresponding drive to make good this deficit – through the medium of same-sex, or "homosexual" relationships' (Moberly 1983b: 2). Absence of identification with the same-sex parent results in malformation of gender identity; this may, she claims, 'be expressed in effeminacy in the male homosexual and quasi-masculinity in the female homosexual' (1983b: 8). The solution to meeting the unmet needs homosexual desire signifies is 'the meeting of same-sex needs without sexual activity' (1983b: 19). Moberly contends that strong, non-sexual same-sex friendships can facilitate same-sex identification, leading to 'healing' and a heterosexual orientation.

Endorsing Moberly's thesis, Marks explained that homosexuality can occur when fathers withhold physical affection from boys in childhood. Like Devenish, Virgo and separate spheres discourse he paid near-exclusive attention to *male* homosexuality. In echoes of Haslam and Holden's earlier discussions, the 'problem' of father absence is rearticulated as the cause of 'malformed' gender identity and homosexuality.

Like Moberly, Marks said good male friendship provided a counterbalance to homosexual sex, observing that in cultures where men express physical affection towards each other, no 'gay scene' exists; homosexuality is simply an 'exercise of power.' In this he echoes Foucault's point made in an interview shortly before his death (with different ideological motives) that a homosexual identity only emerged because of the disappearance of close male friendship as a social institution in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century West (Owens 1987: 230). But despite the precautionary effects of close male friendships Marks had discovered desire often remained. He had recently concluded that because people need companionship, committed, monogamous gay sexual relationships, though not ideal, may be acceptable.[186] After Marks' talk he invited questions, and many were asked. Although my

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[186] Marks articulated this view extremely cautiously. Courage's website (www.courage.org.uk/home.htm, accessed 22nd May 2003) reveals that his new acceptance of same-sex sexual relationships earned him much criticism from evangelicals. After consultation the Evangelical Alliance concluded that Courage had stepped outside the parameters of its 1998 *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality* report (Evangelical Alliance 1998). Courage

subsequent interviews showed Marks' view was more liberal than that of most Westsiders, Marks was treated politely and no substantial challenges posed.

Marks' presentation prompted Westside to review their attitudes in the weeks afterwards and provoked further conversations. A fortnight later Simon suggested the group discuss 'what came out of Jeremy's talk.' Rachel said she now 'felt more compassionate' towards gay people. Grace said she felt God had used the talk to 'challenge me about my judgemental attitude to homosexuals'. She had been brought up to believe that homosexuality was 'terrible', but now realised 'it's no worse than other things [i.e. sins]'. Simon verbalised his new insights:

> Simon says he was struck by the importance of the father in the family in affirming his son and helping him develop as a man. Simon says he's a 'bloke's bloke', a 'northern lad' who's 'forthright, confident' and mucks around at work with the other blokes. There are several blokes at work who aren't like that: one's gay, others are 'perhaps a bit camp or a bit weak or too shy' and he and the others tend to exclude them from the 'blokey' mucking around because they assume they wouldn't be interested in joining in. But Simon realises from Jeremy's talk that male affirmation is precisely what they need and have lacked. He sees that he has a responsibility to be 'brotherly' to them and include them and affirm them, 'because I'm exactly the kind of bloke they'd like affirmation from'. (fieldnotes)

(In the pub a week earlier he had made similar comments, setting himself up as a 'northern lad, a real man' who did not – before Marks' talk – socialise with his gay colleague.) In the incident above Simon begins asserting his own 'real' masculinity: he is a 'bloke's bloke', a 'northern lad' who's 'forthright, confident' and 'mucks around at work with the other blokes'. He links 'camp', 'weak' and 'shy' masculinity with gay masculinity, which he considers equally negative manifestations of masculinity. As research has shown, assertion of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity depends upon the rejection and subordination of homosexuality and femininity (the two are regarded as connected). Men constructing 'acceptable' heterosexual masculinity participate in what Mac an Ghaill (1994: 90) calls 'a double relationship, of traducing the "other", including women and gays (external relations), at the same time as expelling femininity and homosexuality from within themselves (internal

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resigned from the Evangelical Alliance in March 2002. Marks' change of direction was not announced publicly until after he visited Westside; to my knowledge, Westside were unaware of it. It is likely that had Westside leaders realised Marks had adopted this more liberal stance he would not have been invited.

relations)'. Simon appears to do this through asserting himself as (and reassuring himself that he is) 'a bloke's bloke'.

Simon's construction of 'real' heterosexual masculinity in contradistinction to what he considers weak or homosexual confirms theories about 'hegemonic masculinity' advanced especially by Connell (Carrigan et al. 1987; Connell 1987, 1995, 2002; Segal 1990: 134-167). Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's work on class hegemony and its consensual status he theorises that there exists a 'type' or process of masculinity he calls 'hegemonic masculinity.' Hegemonic masculinity is a transcultural concept, he argues: it is the form of masculinity that is hegemonic in any given culture. Connell pays most attention, though, to masculinity in western modernity. Hegemonic masculinity appears sometimes in his writing as an ideal about what constitutes 'proper' or 'real' masculinity. More importantly, hegemonic masculinity signifies the (changing) social processes that constitute, and that men evoke in constituting, masculinity as dominance over all women and over certain types of men (notably, those considered effeminate or gay). 'The most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity', he writes, 'is that it is heterosexual, being closely connected to the institution of marriage; and a key form of subordinated masculinity is homosexual. This subordination involves both direct interactions and a kind of ideological warfare.' These ideological and interactional 'transactions are tied together by the contempt for homosexuality and homosexual men that is part of the ideological package of hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 1987: 186). Conscious that this theorisation was simplistic and that plural forms of masculinity exist, he later (1995) proposed that masculinity be divided into four types: hegemonic, subordinated, complicit and marginalised. There are 'relations of alliance, dominance and subordination' within and between masculinities (1995: 37), and while some men are able to exert hegemony, others are more likely to be complicit – that is, they 'benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the subordination of women' though they fail to embody hegemonic masculinity; they are not the 'frontline troops of patriarchy' (1995: 79). Others remain marginalised because of their class or ethnicity yet should be distinguished from subordinate masculinities because they are not (like gay or androgynous masculinities) actively subordinated (1995: 80-81).

While Simon's understanding and previous interactions with his colleague mirror Connell's descriptions, since Marks' presentation Simon has become willing to befriend men who display forms of masculinity he rejects. He makes friends now in the hope of helping

'gay', 'camp', 'weak' and 'shy' men reject the subordinated masculinities they took on by default because they lacked male or paternal affirmation. Simon wants to become a brother to these men, acknowledging shared masculinity, but he will be an elder brother, modelling a masculinity he hopes they will grow into. It would be a mistake to regard Simon as having rejected his former practice of hegemonic masculinity. However, he has shifted: from outright condemnation (and, arguably, homophobia) to cautious, patronising sympathy.

While Marks' visit revealed greater opposition to than acceptance of homosexuality – in other words, a Victorian view – there was resistance to NFI's anti-homosexuality stance. The most identifiably feminist woman, Jenny, was the only person to answer the interview question 'Would you ever consider it acceptable for a Christian to be involved in a homosexual sexual relationship? (If yes, under what circumstances?)' in the affirmative. She criticised churches' intolerance and rejection of gay people:

> For me, it's acceptable, two people who love each other, regardless of whether they're homosexual or heterosexual…but I recognise that it's not biblical, um and I'm really relieved that I don't have to be the judge...I know lots of homosexuals who are very committed to each other…I can't say whether it's right for them to have that relationship, I can't be the judge of that…For me it's acceptable but, and I think, you know, sin is sin and sexual sin is sexual sin for heterosexuals and homosexuals…But heterosexuals, particularly within the church, tend to regard homosexual sin, homosexual sex, as an outrage and an abomination to God, whereas they see it as much more normal for themselves to lust after others or to have affairs or whatever and find that God's much more willing to forgive them than he'd be, in their perception, to forgive homosexuals in the same situation…I think we have to be very careful not to judge lest we be judged and I find the attitude in the evangelical church towards homosexuals a lot of the time very distasteful.

Jenny believes homosexuality is a legitimate expression of masculinity (the gay people she has known have mostly been men). However, to state that her view is contrary to the 'biblical' view aligns her theological understanding with that of other Westside members, all who believe, some stating biblical grounds, that sexual activity in a homosexual relationship is sinful. Stephen Hunt's (2003) observation that Christians who defend homosexuality argue from experience rather than from the Bible applies in Jenny's case.

Eleven Westside members answered the homosexuality interview question with a straightforward 'no.' Compared with the general population (according to the British Social Attitudes survey in 1999, 32% of British women and 44% of men believe same-sex sexual

activity is 'always wrong' [Hinds & Jarvis 2000: 112]) Westside were more likely to oppose homosexuality. As in the general population, Westside men were more opposed than women to homosexuality (Sharpe 2002); that 'appropriate' masculinity often involves subordinating homosexuality in a way that appropriate femininity does not accounts for this. Beth was most vehemently opposed, pathologising and abnormalising homosexuality: 'it's like a spiritual sickness because God created men and women to be together, [which] is a normal thing, because God is normal and pure. [Homosexuality's] not normal.' Five said that it was not, or 'probably not' acceptable, but gay people should be treated 'gently', with 'grace' and given time to change their lifestyle upon conversion to Christianity. Sarah explained that while homosexuality is a sin, God never gives up on people and will, in his timing and with gentleness, convince people to change their behaviour: 'The power of God's grace is very, very powerful. And it says, and [the Bible] talks about his kindness leading people to repentance. Not his wrath, not his anger, his kindness.' The remaining three did not consider homosexuality 'ideal'; as Karen said, 'I'm not saying it's wrong, but I don't think it's the best way.'

In her interview Dawn, also someone with feminist views, discussed the relationship between gender and sexuality through her story of a man who contemplated a sex change.

> In a church I used to go to,[187] um I noticed that there was a guy who was very small, very slight um, very creative, er, just brilliant, but if he was in secular society you'd definitely think, you'd definitely say he's homosexual, he's gay, that is it, that's his label. In the church he – he's able to be a Christian and be himself. And if Christians start to label these people, if Christians start to say 'right, he is too effeminate, he doesn't fit our idea of what a man should be', then where does he have to go, what does he have to do?… I remember listening to a speaker, a guy who actually became a Christian before he went to have a sex change and – fascinating, brilliant stuff, because he still had all the mannerisms of somebody you'd expect to see as quite a camp person. But he said, he challenged our judgements, he challenged how we saw him and basically his, his whole life, ever since he was a child, he was told 'you're wet, you're weak, you're gay' and so that's the only path he saw for himself. So if churches start to put people in these boxes then it happens…
> *KA: So the guy didn't have that sex change in the end?*
> No he didn't, it was er, it wasn't like he was converted on the table or anything, but he had been looking into God and he said 'God if you're there, um show me a sign and I won't go ahead with this sex change' and the clinic closed and they, and he was driving into work and he heard an announcement that the clinic had closed and the doctors had decided that no, this wasn't the right thing to do, um, that it was actually

[187] Not an NFI church.

quite wrong psychologically. They weren't Christians or anything. They were talking from a medical point of view.
KA: So how did he cope with –
He was fine. He became a Christian and he gradually let go of his past ideas and I think he basically got healing and within a year of being at church he married somebody and he's got an 18-year-old daughter now. I hope I've told that story right.

Several points stand out. First, Dawn considers Christian environments more tolerant than 'secular society' of non-hegemonic forms of masculinity and therefore healthier. Second, she rejects the labelling of androgynous, 'effeminate' or camp masculinities as inferior. Dawn's interpretation – and indeed construction (for recounting is also construction) – of this event is postfeminist. On the one hand she, with feminists, opposes gender stereotyping: she rejects 'idea[s] of what a man should be'. Furthermore, she accords with the social constructionist approach to sexuality and gender advocated by pro-feminist Foucauldian theorists (e.g. Hollway 1984, Singer 1992) who consider dominant discourses of sexuality and gender responsible for constructing sexual and gender identities: they prescribe what they claim to describe. For Dawn, the man took on a self-identity of gay or transsexual because others labelled him that way. Similarly, some 'labelling theorists' have argued from a social interactionist perspective that some 'homosexual' people interact with, sometimes appropriate, such labelling in social interaction to produce (or resist – see Segal 1990: 136) their identities in ways that accord with these dominant discourses (McIntosh 1968; Plummer 1975, 1981a, 1981b). So while the concept of a homosexual *person* dates only from the late nineteenth century – before then, only homosexual *acts* were labelled and condemned as 'unnatural' because they were not procreative (Segal 1990: 135) – it has been appropriated by some 'homosexuals' who have developed subcultures based on homosexual personal identity. Interestingly, however, Dawn's (feminist) condemnation of gender stereotyping fails to progress to tolerance of homosexuality or transsexuality, which she sees as negative forms of masculinity (as separate spheres or backlash perspectives would). Dawn also exhibits the traditional side of the postfeminist tension in believing that the man's rejection of the surgical procedure and his 'past ideas', his conversion to Christianity, marriage and the birth of his daughter constitute 'healing.'

Disciplining male heterosexual desire

NFI's goal of disciplining young men's sexual desires was demonstrated in Ray Lowe's 2000 and 2001 seminars for teenage boys at Stoneleigh. The 2001 seminar, 'Being one of the Lads,' persuaded boys not to be 'one of the lads' but be 'a man of God.' Its focus on actively constructing masculinity is strong.

Lowe described his youth in post-war London. He 'hung around' with a 'bunch of lads', playing football, smoking, stealing and engaging in mutual masturbation. Converting to Christianity in his late teens, his life dramatically changed. He had, he said, to make two choices. First, he had to decide 'who was going to rule over' his body – specifically the sexual body.

> When you wake up with an erection in the morning, which is natural, God's made us that way, you have a choice whether you're gonna masturbate, whether you're gonna fantasise about women or whether you're not gonna, you're gonna get out of bed, you're gonna bring your mind and your body in subjection to yourself.

Men should emulate Jesus, Lowe argues. Jesus 'never once sinned…never ever once looked at a bird and sort of lusted in his heart, never ever tried to look up a woman's skirt, never looked down her blouse, never ever looked at a porno picture, never once masturbated.' 'Can you imagine that?' Lowe asks, 'That's cool, isn't it…Because he suffered in that way, when we become Christians he gives us…the power in our lives to overcome sin.' The natural man, in his sexual corporality, tends towards all manner of negative sexual manifestations of masculinity. He is a sinner who needs to be changed.

Lowe's term 'lads' is significant and invokes two generations of laddism. The first is the working-class laddism of Lowe's post-war London childhood. Lowe's implicit construction of class is interesting, for as the Victorian middle classes looked down upon working-class men's sexuality as crude and needing restraint within marriage, so Lowe rejects the working-class masculinity of his youth (behaviour illustrated in more complexity by texts like Willmott's [1966] *Adolescent Boys of East London* and Willis's [1977] *Learning to Labour*). Lowe's conversion gave him upward mobility. Having married, he became a church leader. If Lowe exemplifies the transformation of masculinity from working-class sexual liberty to middle-class sexual self-control, it appears that NFI gender practices are consonant with middle-class values and transformative of class status.

The second generation of lads are the young men at Lowe's seminar who were born in the backlash Thatcher years. Their (presumed) behaviour resembles Lowe's own youth, though it has taken on new meanings. For example, consumption of football was particularly associated with being a lad in the 1990s (King 1997) and is equated with consciously anti- or non-feminist new laddism. Referring to his audience as 'lads' (and women as 'birds') Lowe tacitly endorses the ideas and behaviour associated with the term. Yet at the same time he teaches NFI lads to reject a key component of laddish behaviour: sexual pleasure outside marriage. Indeed, the major point of the seminar is to persuade young men to practice sexual self-control, for 'lads' to become 'men of God.' (A feminist critique is absent from Lowe's seminar. He links his antagonism to pornography not to a desire to oppose the objectification of women but to a conception that lust is sinful.)

Like Lowe, Westsiders believe that men's sexual desires can be tamed, with God's help, within marriage. Discussing the relative merits of marriage and singleness with Mark and Jane, Jane told me that Christian men often want to marry because of 'the physical side, which isn't really the case with women.' During interview two Westside members suggested as a reason why men were less likely than women to go to church that men found it harder to follow Christian sexual prohibitions. In response to my question 'Do you think Christian masculinity should be different from Christian femininity?' Emma suggested that the sexual self-control Christian masculinity required was one way masculinity and femininity differed. 'I do think that men need sex more than women', she said. This view that men are more lustful than women harks back to Victorian attitudes.

Westside members, in what can be read as the process of producing hegemonic masculinity, endorse a stereotype of an ideal 'real man' or 'man's man' – a slightly more mature version of the new lad perhaps – who enjoys football, sex with women, male collegiality and joking, but is also strong, assertive and able, where necessary, to exercise self-control (Feirstein 1982; Whelehan 2000: 58-76). They concur that 'real men' are highly (hetero)sexually motivated. Largely in jest, three people interviewed recommended harnessing this in order to evangelise men. 'The other way to get men to church is to have lots of attractive women!' Chris joked, after giving one suggestion about how to convert men. One of the regular conversations at house group about the lack of men prompted the following exchange:

> Chris mentions to Simon that Alison [new member] is coming next week. Simon and someone else note that she's another woman and they need more men. Sarah says 'We'll have to get praying for men.' Chris says: 'Simon, you need to get your friend Matt saved. Simon, you and I'll have to go walking the streets looking for men.' Simon adds, 'We'll show them pictures of the girls in the group – "this is Kristin, she's in her 20s, attractive; you like?" Everyone laughs and Sarah shakes her head disapprovingly but joins in the laughter. Jenny says 'and me!' Chris says 'I thought you didn't want to get married again?' Jenny says she probably doesn't, but if she does she'll get Chris to give her away. (fieldnotes)

This incident, which made me uncomfortable and irritated, reveals how humour can be used to express attitudes that are generally unacceptable. It also demonstrates an essentialist belief that men's 'natural' sexual inclinations should be harnessed to draw them into the church. During his interview Chris told me: 'the only reason I ever went to church in the first place is that my girlfriend said she'd finish with me if I didn't come to church.' The level of acceptability of what is, in a feminist understanding, an objectification of me is significant, for while Sarah shook her head censoriously, the others laughed and no one directly challenged Chris and Simon. Indeed, Jenny teasingly objected that she had *not* been so highlighted.

Yet Westside do not always endorse sexually motivated masculinity. Eleven of them answered my question 'Would you ever consider it acceptable for a Christian to be involved in a heterosexual sexual relationship outside marriage? (If yes, under what circumstances?)' in the negative. All but one of the rest (Jenny, who thought sex outside marriage was acceptable) explained that sex outside marriage was less than ideal and they would expect those converting to Christianity to eventually cease any non-marital sexual relationships. The level of condemnation of non-marital sex was the same as of homosexuality.

Westside believe that although men's strong heterosexual desires are 'natural', they are disquieting. Westside's men are wary of the potential their desires hold to lead them away from church, faith and their families. During my fieldwork I heard various stories recounted about church leaders who had affairs, lost their church positions and abandoned their wives and children (e.g. T. Virgo 2001: 94). I heard others about men addicted to pornography, who, through receiving prophecies from others encouraging them to renounce it, decided to do so. These men do not necessarily view their heterosexuality as a position of power; rather, they are vulnerable, out of control (Metcalf & Humphries 1985; Segal 1990: 205-232, 1994).

During a house group at which Chris spoke about 'being hot for Jesus'[188] he asked us to explain 'what motivates us to be hot for Jesus?' Ann said she was motivated by God's love, Ruth by the hope of heaven, and Chris by 'fear of failure.' He went on:

> 'Because I believe God's calling me to do significant things for him in [Westside's location] I fear I'll blow it, like go and have an affair or something. [NFI leader] was saying to me that if he had an affair he'd lose everything: job, house, maybe wife, maybe kids. Everything's tied up in the church because he's full time.'

At this point someone interjected 'but people still do it,' to which Chris replied, 'One of my friends was really going for it [spiritually]. He was a worship leader, and then he blew it. He's gradually getting back on track but it's taking a while.' Chris's fear of his sexual desires' potential to lead him astray and the vulnerability he exhibits in discussing this publicly are significant. Although his belief in the potency of his desires aligns him with a hegemonic separate spheres discourse, his sense of weakness and lack of control undermine this.

Westside generally condemn the exercise of men's sexuality outside marriage. They believe that sexually, men pose a threat to women and advise their female members to safeguard themselves against men's desires. Elsewhere (Aune 1998) I note the way such strategies shift responsibility for men's sexual behaviour onto women; Storkey (1988) argues that this has occurred since early in the church's history. Their critiques of men as overly sexually motivated converge with radical feminist analyses of male heterosexuality as dangerous to women. But this belief was also present in the nineteenth century: Davidoff and Hall (1987: 404) explain that middle-class women were believed to need escorts when travelling to protect them from men's advances. When Jenny announced that she was going on holiday with a male friend, Chris told her: 'we'll pray for protection, for you flying with a married man whose wife's not going.' Whether Chris meant he would pray for God to protect Jenny from the desire to become involved with the man or from any seduction attempts the man made, was unclear. Another time, I recounted to the house group my experience with a flirtatious optician who gave me a free pair of glasses. Not finding this amusing, Sarah cautioned: 'take a friend with you when you go back,' telling me she had encountered an optician who 'leaned on me and made me feel uncomfortable.' Explaining in his interview

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[188] This phrase means being passionate about one's faith.

that he felt men and women had become too independent, individualistic and ignored gender differences, Tom said people should acknowledge gender differences. For instance, 'a woman walking home is vulnerable,' he said, 'and maybe a man should say "listen, let me just make sure you get home".'

These incidents construct a dichotomy between two masculinities: there are bad non-Christian men whose unrestrained natural urges threaten to violate women, and there are good Christian men who have learned to master their desires. Class issues are also implicated. The 'good' Christian men who are or have become middle-class pose no risk to women. While they may fail *themselves* sexually (adulterous affairs may lose them their wives and families) they are regarded as posing no violent threat to women. In contrast the 'bad' non-Christian (working-class) men who prey on women in public arenas are the men whom women should fear. This portrayal of some of the connections between class, geography and sexual violence is inaccurate, for most violence against women occurs at home (across all classes) and by known assailants (Kelly 1988).

Conclusions

NFI give masculinity more discursive attention than femininity, as happened during the 'secular' anti-feminist backlash. Through exploring the themes of fatherhood and male sexuality this chapter has demonstrated NFI's conformity to postfeminist ideas and practices in contemporary Britain. Their allegiance to separate spheres and backlash notions of fatherhood and sexuality is stronger than to those of feminism. As regards fatherhood, NFI adhere particularly to backlash anxieties about father absence and calls for authoritative and breadwinner fathering. Yet their advocacy of men's involvement in childcare also draws on feminist discourses. Where male sexuality is concerned, notwithstanding a few Westside members' soft-feminist interrogation of this, displays of vulnerability and sympathy towards homosexuality, NFI endorse separate spheres British notions of men's sexual strength and repudiate deviations from married sex. Furthermore, ethnographic observation at Westside reveals more sympathy with feminist critiques than is evident in NFI's public discourse, demonstrating that notions of masculinity are most malleable where they are least tightly controlled by NFI's leaders.

Chapter 8

Women's Singleness

Introduction

The concentration on marriage and the family in research on evangelicals and gender has caused singleness (the state of being unmarried or unpartnered) to be neglected. This is the case within social research more generally; singleness is seen as an anomalous and unimportant focus compared with the more significant marital 'norm' (Jelin 1992: 109-110). Omission of singleness from research on evangelicalism and gender is surprising and disturbing, given the numerical presence of single people in evangelical churches. Research by the Evangelical Alliance found that never-married, divorced, separated and widowed people together accounted for 35% of adult church members in 1991, a proportion then only marginally less than that of single adults in Britain as a whole. Just over two-thirds of these single Christians were female (Chilcraft 1993: 73-4). Since the proportion of single adults in the UK has since increased, the proportion of evangelicals who are single has probably also risen.

Because Christian singleness has rarely been researched, there has been little examination of the effect, upon single people and Christian gender beliefs and practices, of evangelical discourses that locate ideal gender identity in marriage and parenthood. Though Bendroth (1993) and Brasher (1998) in the US and Foster (1992), Toulis (1997) and Franks (2001) in the UK refer to (women's) singleness, none of these discussions lasts more than a few pages.

My ethnographic study of a New Church congregation (Aune 1998) and follow-up interview and questionnaire research with a cross-section of nearly one hundred women from various denominations (Aune 2002) is the first substantial research addressing contemporary evangelical single women's status. I describe their 'threefold marginality': as evangelicals they are marginalised in British society, as women they are marginalised within their

generally male-led congregations, and as single people they are marginalised in comparison with the married (Aune 1998: 19-20). Noting parallels with research on non-Christian women and singleness in the West, I find that evangelical women view their singleness ambivalently. While their faith helps them take a positive attitude to celibacy, sensing in it divine guidance, at church singleness is regarded as an inferior state and they may be pressurised to marry. They commonly have reduced access to positions of responsibility and leadership in the church; this marginality is 'compounded by dilemmas about whether women should be accepted into church leadership and preaching roles' (Aune 2002: 95).

The relationship between evangelical and British cultural views of singleness is striking. I argue in this chapter that as they do for marriage and masculinity, evangelicals utilise the 'cultural tool kits' (Gallagher 2003) of nineteenth-century gender conservatism, feminism and backlash to construct their meanings and experiences of singleness within a late-modern context where social actors are beginning to be located 'post-' these predominantly modern discourses. This chapter explores this postfeminist contradiction around singleness, relating it to the gender patterns in NFI and Westside. Discussion is confined to women's singleness for four reasons: most single evangelicals are women; most Westside women were single; single men were almost entirely absent from Westside; and because meanings attached to singleness vary significantly by gender, particularly historically.

Separate spheres singleness

Separate spheres ideology has been troubling to and troubled by single women. As the literature examining the British context demonstrates, four themes predominated in attitudes to women's singleness within the nineteenth-century middle-class discourse of separate spheres: singleness as marginality, as threat, as subversive of 'correct' femininity and consequently as a waiting state.

Tuula Gordon's (1994) empirical study demonstrates that single people subsist 'on the margins' of western societies. Marginality is a social location enforced upon those who do not conform to central societal assumptions; it can also be a place where these assumptions are challenged. Gordon argues that while social interaction, cultural patterns and

the media reinforce the lifestyles of the married, or at least the partnered, single people's lifestyles are rarely legitimised. As Joan Chandler (1991: 3) puts it, women have been placed on 'the marital continua' as 'more or less marginal to marriage, more or less connected to men'. Their marginality is a product of what Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh (1982) call 'familialism', the organisation of society (and in contemporary Britain the welfare state) in which the male-headed nuclear family is seen as the basic unit of a stable society. Furthermore, since such a family has been, within modern western societies, the basic economic unit in which men command higher, often 'family', wages, poverty has rendered single women (especially working-class women) economically marginal (Hufton 1981).

The threat theme is linked to familialism, for singleness is taken to undermine 'the (separate spheres) family'. Suspicion of single women's sexuality, particularly of 'promiscuity' or lesbianism, often accompanied this perception of their threatening status (Chandler 1991: 90). Women without husbands have been made 'a focus of public concern and state interest', regarded as 'social anomalies' or 'social problems' (Chandler 1991: 6).

Anthropological work on gender demonstrates how frequently achievement of successful gender identities is tied to heterosexual partnership (often marriage) and reproduction. Singleness disrupts these concepts of femininity and masculinity. Single people cannot fulfil expected ways of being feminine or masculine and consequently their gender identities are questioned (Kitch 1989). However, single men and women's gender identities are differently questioned. In the West, women's singleness has faced particular interrogation. Within separate spheres ideology the problematic nature of female singleness was heightened. While singleness barely hindered men from carrying out the worker role with which masculinity was closely identified, for women singleness prohibited the 'feminine' role of wife and mother (Jalland 1986: 257-8; Davidoff & Hall 1987; Chandler 1991; Gordon 1994: 126).

These perceptions of singleness as marginal, threatening and unfeminine were, in the Victorian era, partially resolved through interpreting singleness as a state of waiting for marriage. Women's singleness was not desired, but was a less-than-happy state women wished to escape. The difficulty of achieving economic independence influenced single women's decisions to marry and the pressure to marry which others placed upon them. Additionally, the centrality of marriage in evangelical ideology further affected (positively or negatively) single women's consideration of marriage (Davidoff & Hall 1987: 323-326).

Martha Vicinus (1985: 3-5) describes the 'symbolic triad' Victorians created in which only three roles were asserted for women: wife and mother, celibate spinster and prostitute. Wifehood and motherhood were considered ideal and 'natural.' However, due partly to the higher male death rate, male emigration and service in the colonies or armed forces, women outnumbered men, rendering many unable to marry (others chose not to). In 1851, the population included one million single women of 25 and over (Gordon 1994: 9), nearly half a million more women than men (Jeffreys 1985: 86). This 'spinster problem' was frequently debated during the second half of the nineteenth century, and parliamentary debates led to the proposal to ship single women to the colonies where there were surplus men they could marry (Jeffreys 1985: 87).[189] (Only a few took this up.) Because marriage was considered the norm, few occupations were available for single women. Some working-class women found work in domestic service (Davidoff et al. 1999: 158-182), where singleness was almost required; others worked in industries such as textiles, sometimes in factories (Rendall 1990). Genteel poor women could choose from three badly paid occupations: governess, companion or seamstress. Other single women belonged to families whose wealth and bourgeois values did not require – or desire – their paid employment. These women remained with their parents, acting as surrogate wives to widowed fathers or unmarried brothers (Jalland 1986: 258). In the absence of a welfare state some families encouraged one daughter to remain unmarried to care for her aging parents (Watkins 1984). Spinsters' excess energy was thought best directed towards philanthropy and religion. Jalland's study reveals three types of Victorian spinster. The majority, 'dutiful daughters', accepted Victorian assumptions and 'tended to see themselves as passive, acquiescent and unhappy.'[190]

Feminist singleness

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, significant numbers of women involved in feminist work considered singleness (generally also celibacy) a feminist position.

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[189] Despite the Victorian concern with spinsterhood, Jalland (1986: 254) points out that spinsters were not a new phenomenon. Concern about the 'spinster problem' was due to social factors, including new attention to census records.

[190] A tiny minority became 'rebels', seeking escape 'through invalidism, drugs or other desperate means.' A large minority became 'new women', finding within themselves the capacity to transcend and transform their status and find fulfilment in autonomy (Jalland 1986: 253-289).

Unmarried women formed the backbone of the first-wave feminist movement (Auchmuty 1975; Vicinus 1985). Even some evangelical women, like journalist Marianne Farningham in the second half of the nineteenth century, considered both singleness and feminism helpful in promoting women's independence (Wilson 2002).

Second-wave feminists also challenged devaluation of singleness, instead problematising marriage as an arena of women's oppression. Singleness had by then become more economically viable due to women's improved position in the job market and new legal status (Jelin 1992: 113-117; Heineman 1999: xii). Andrea Dworkin (1988: 133), viewing heterosexual intercourse as a cause of women's objectification and possession by men, saw celibacy as an opportunity for women to experience selfhood and identity. Sally Cline (1994) argues similarly that celibacy enables women to reject the 'genital myth' prescribing sexual activity for all women. Liz Hodgkinson critiques what she sees as a widespread social exaltation of sexual activity. She argues that celibacy is more conducive to health and happiness; she believes also that 'there can never be true equality between the sexes while there is a sexual ingredient in a relationship' (Hodgkinson 1986: 96). Feminists have challenged the negative associations attached to the term 'spinster' from the nineteenth century; Mary Daly (1979) reclaims 'spinsters' as creative and powerful. Through research into three women's communities, the medieval sisterhood of nuns, the *hetairai* of antiquity and the Chinese marriage registers, Janice Raymond (1986) demonstrates how celibacy facilitates female friendship and community.

For other feminists, singleness does not demand celibacy but creates opportunities for sexual agency, exploration and freedom with men, as American *Cosmopolitan* editor Helen Gurley Brown (1963) argued in *Sex and the Single Girl*. Brown's dislike of marriage was matched by her enthusiasm for single women having careers and freedom to explore sexual relationships (Baumgardner & Richards 2000: 153-161). Magazines like *Cosmopolitan* have continued to advocate sexual enjoyment for unmarried and sometimes uncoupled women. Singleness also facilitated (sometimes closeted) lesbian relationships (Jeffreys 1985). Non-celibate feminist singleness primarily involves women's right to choose, rather than be pressurised into, their engagement in sexual relationships.

Backlash singleness

While feminism promoted singleness, the recent backlash urges a return to marriage and casts doubt on the viability of singleness for women. Popular television dating shows and self-help books (e.g. Fein & Schneider 1995; Doyle 2002; Greenwald 2004) recommend strategies to help single women find partners. These publications and cultural representations position singleness as a period of looking for a partner rather than a legitimate state in itself. In the North American context, Faludi (1992: 27-36) describes as one of the 'myths of the backlash' a late-1980s panic engendered by news stories based on disputable sociological research about a 'man shortage' that would make it difficult for single women to find partners. Moral panics around lone motherhood in Britain, with their punitive policy approaches (Kiernan et al. 1998), represent a similar backlash.

Some backlash writers blame single women's presumed 'unhappiness' on feminism: Danielle Crittenden (1999) in the US and James Tooley (2002) in Britain argue that by elevating career advancement over family life,[191] feminism has created a generation of unhappily-single women who are independent, self-absorbed and unattractive to potential husbands. Rosenfelt and Stacey (1987) posit that such panics over single women's need for male partners may have been facilitated by the post-1970s demise of female solidarity. The backlash derogation of singleness reproduces older notions of singleness as marginal, threatening, subversive of femininity and a waiting state.

Postfeminist singleness

The last few decades saw singleness and solo household occupancy grow significantly. 48% of women were unmarried in 2000, while between 1971 and 2001 the proportion of households occupied by a single person rose from 18% to 30% (ONS 2002: 40). Changes in partnership formation, including increased divorce and cohabitation, have contributed to this. The rise in cohabitation has weakened the previous correlation between being unmarried and unpartnered, problematising the definition of 'singleness'. Childlessness is increasing, with a record 23% of women born in 1973 predicted to be childless at forty-five (ONS 2000: 44). The proportion of lone parent families, nine out of ten of them female-

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[191] Whether or not this is true.

headed, has almost doubled since 1981 and now stands at 19% (ONS 2003: 43; Kiernan et al. 1998).

As sexuality's link to reproduction weakens, women (single women too) are having more sexual partners (Boseley 2001). Levels of reported sexual abstinence appear hardly higher amongst non-cohabiting than cohabiting women, and a minority of single women are celibate.[192] While women's agency in initiating relationships with men is probably overplayed in the cultural representations harnessed to 'prove' women possess sexual freedom,[193] women's (generally white and middle-class) somewhat greater economic resources may have facilitated increased sexual confidence. Yet what Jessie Bernard (1973: 33-34) calls the 'marriage gradient' (the tendency for men to marry women of slightly lower age, educational qualifications and occupational status) remains. In comparison with men, single women 'are more likely to have higher general ability scores, and to be highly educated and in high status occupations, while single men are more likely to be members of the lowest social class or unemployed' (Kiernan 1988).

In late modernity, the reflexive self increasingly consumes, rather than produces or works at, relationships. The rise of dating agencies and advertisements demonstrate how capitalist processes of consumption are increasingly harnessed in the search for intimacy (Bauman 2000: 163-164; Jagger 2001). While a 'marriage marketplace' is not new, it has become more popular. Furthermore, it is gendered in postfeminist fashion. If feminism or women's increased economic independence have opened the dating market to women, women still do not search for partners on an equal basis with men. Studies of dating advertisements indicate a continued tendency for male advertisers to highlight their financial resources, while women stress their appearance. Elizabeth Jagger (2001) in fact argues that despite some women's 'brainy and beautiful,' 'independent and feminine' self-descriptions, a narrower range of identities are available to female advertisers, who construct their advertisements in relation to cultural understandings that 'sex sells' and that women especially are sexual signifiers; men's advertisements, meanwhile, are more diverse, less gender-traditional.

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[192] A 1999 Department of Health survey found that 17% of women aged between sixteen and forty-nine who were neither married nor cohabiting had had no sexual partners in the previous year. 13% of married or cohabiting people also had not had a sexual partner in the previous year (Dawe & Meltzer 2001: 19).
[193] Notably the television series *Sex and the City* (Bushnell 1997).

Postfeminist female singleness is therefore exemplified by tensions between (feminist) approval of singleness as legitimate, valuable and empowering and a simultaneous disapprobation of it in favour of heterosexual partnership and marriage with women presented as sexually available and romantically needy. Perhaps reflecting the numerical increase in singleness, popular cultural representations of single women proliferated from the mid 1990s – notably US television series *Ally McBeal* and *Sex and the City* and Helen Fielding's (1997; 1999) British novel and film *Bridget Jones's Diary*. While no empirical study has considered the experiences of British single women in this period of their heightened visibility in visual culture, some cultural studies work examines representations of female singleness. As Chapter 3 explains, Lotz (2001) and Moseley and Read (2002) understand *Ally McBeal* and *Sex and the City* as spaces where the 'contradiction' (Lotz) and 'tensions' (Moseley & Read) that constitute postfeminism are played out in the lives of young, single, career women.

These shows are partly feminist. Bridget Jones' single friends are the 'urban family' she turns to for refuge from 'Smug Marrieds', the 'old-fashioned blood family' (Fielding 2001: 54) and the changeability of romantic relationships. Single characters sometimes promote feminist principles (Fielding 1997: 127). Furthermore, they no longer shackle sex to reproduction: Bridget is sexually intimate with two men and supports her friend Tom's gay lifestyle. And yet they are also traditional: Fielding employs a Jane Austen-style plot; Bridget adheres to traditional codes of romance, agonising over her appearance as she dreams of happiness with a 'tall, dark, handsome' man. And despite paying lip service to feminist values, Bridget stops short of feminist political action. As Shelley Cobb (2004) proposes, Bridget represents a postfeminist construction of a woman enjoying feminism's benefits (e.g. a career) but rejecting feminism's personal agendas (e.g. its critique of romance). McRobbie (2002) understands *Bridget Jones's Diary* as a manifestation of postfeminism's 'double entanglement.'

Postfeminist singleness in NFI

Singleness in public NFI discourse

I encountered little public discourse about singleness at NFI.[194] Unlike marriage, singleness is not foundational to NFI's gender theology, and I came across no books or articles about it. This contrasts with the comparative proliferation of discussions of masculinity and marriage and with the broader evangelical subculture's considerable attention to singleness: since at least the 1980s, an evangelical book about singleness has been published in Britain every few years, often of the self-help genre; notable recent titles include *Letters from a Solo Survivor* (Keay 1991), *Single: The Jesus Model (*Wraight 1995), *No Sex Please We're Single: The Search for a Marriage Partner* (Gregory 1997) and *The Single Issue (*Hsu 1997).[195]

Stoneleigh's 2000 seminar 'Single and Significant', led by pastor Greg Haslam and the only NFI talk on singleness I uncovered, is illustrative of the tension NFI hold out between a strong traditionalist preference for marriage and a weaker commitment to singleness. Haslam initially constructs singleness as traumatic. He explains that having led a church with a large population of young people for twenty years, he and his wife have been acquainted with many singles, so 'know something of the pain that they pass through.' Describing his family, a wife whom he married at the age of 21 and three teenage sons ('all of whom are interested in girls, thank God!') he says that in seeking to prepare his sons for marriage he has developed many insights into singleness. This introduction sets singleness up as a painful youthful period of waiting for marriage.

The seminar breaks into three sections. The first suggests that singleness can be a 'calling'. Being in the image of God, Haslam says, means that human beings need community. Some regrettably assume that marriage is the best example of community and treat single people as second-class. Yet single people are equally able to experience relationship; they can do this particularly within a church. Building strong friendships can counteract the loneliness many single people feel, living in a fragmented and individualistic society. Haslam turns to Jesus' metaphor of the eunuch in Matthew 19,[196] using it to

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[194] Notwithstanding the fact that between 1991 and 2000 Stoneleigh ran as many seminars on singleness (four) as on marriage (email from Janis Peters, 1st May 2002).

[195] Most self-help books about singleness are written from an evangelical Christian perspective. Given that evangelicals constitute less than 5 % of the population, their dominance of this section of the self-help market demonstrates how significant an 'issue' singleness is for evangelicals. Most of these books are written by women.

[196] Mtt. 19:8-12: 'Jesus replied…"I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but

conclude that people are single for three reasons: they were born with no desire for the opposite sex; they have become single as a result of others' actions (bad nurture in childhood leads to homosexuality, he believes); or 'because of choice, a calling under God.' To explain the last, paradoxical, statement, he quotes Roger Neal's comment 'a vocation is nearly always a way of accepting a situation that was at first considered to be a limitation,'[197] encouraging the audience to consider that God may intend their singleness as a vocation, however unhappy they feel about it. Reading from 1 Corinthians 7[198] he argues that singleness is an equally valid status.

Second, Haslam asks 'have you got the calling of singleness?' He provides a checklist for discovering this, concluding that most people do not feel called to singleness and thus need to find a partner. Those called to singleness will be able to assent to the questions 'Is lifelong sexual containment comfortably possible for you?' and 'Do you find fulfilment both relationally and vocationally in other ways?' Many are unable to respond affirmatively, and Haslam lists factors (caused by 'sin', 'worldly thinking' and 'cultural factors') that contribute to this inability to be positive about singleness, including societal linkage of physical beauty with the ability to attract a partner, the long gap between onset of sexual desire and its ability to be fulfilled in marriage (which in British society happens relatively late), the fact that women outnumber men in churches, high divorce rates which make people fear marriage, and emotional damage caused by engaging in multiple sexual relationships. Having proposed that both singleness and ability to achieve happy singleness are products of social problems, Haslam lists four wrong reactions to singleness he observes among single church members: 1) the dreamer, who fantasises about a perfect relationship, thus crippling their ability to live in the present; 2) the activist, who fills his or her life with social engagements in order to avoid being alone; 3) the flirt, in his male persona an egotist and in her female persona a predator; and 4) the embittered and resigned, who complains about the 'lack of talent' and the emphasis churches place on marriage. These four reactions are negative and, as though none exist, Haslam provides no models of contented or well-adjusted singleness. While single men and women are both vilified in these four problematic embodiments, the greater

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only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it." '

[197] I have been unable to trace this comment.

[198] E.g. verse 8: 'to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am.'

weight of Haslam's disapproval is directed to the numerical predominance of female singles. It is single NFI women who complain about 'lack of talent' and the church's emphasis on marriage. Like Wendy Virgo's Jezebellic spirit discourse, this construction of the 'embittered and resigned' as in the wrong prevents these women from challenging the over-privileging of marriage.

In order to become eligible, these wrong reactions must be tackled, Haslam argues in the last section. Implying that they are currently failing in these areas, he gives 'practical considerations' to help single people attract partners. He has three pieces of advice: 'take stock,' 'take steps' and 'avoid traps of illicit sexuality until God satisfies the need.' 'Taking stock' involves single people considering whether they are 'marriageable.' Being marriageable means being 'in good shape physically', having an ordered domestic life, exhibiting spiritual progress ('Every church has its fair sprinkling of members of the Addams family'), being sociable ('many single people are cranky'), in control financially, focused vocationally and 'truly masculine or feminine.' 'Taking steps' involves looking for a partner, perhaps by attending Christian holidays or NFI conferences or asking parents or church leaders to matchmake. Finally, quoting Martin Luther, Haslam says that sexual desire is good but its expression belongs within marriage. Unlike the pornographic emphases of contemporary society, sex should be 'person-centred' rather than 'body-oriented' ('You are not a Kleenex tissue for someone's bodily fluids'). Single people must wait patiently until their sexual desires can be fulfilled within marriage.

The three-section split demonstrates a far stronger emphasis on singleness as a waiting, negative state than as positive. The initial assumption that a 'calling' to singleness is rare shifts the emphasis towards singleness as waiting. The waiting state in which most single people, in Haslam's estimation, find themselves, is not simply passive. Rather, it is a time when single people must prepare for marriage, honing their characters, careers, appearance and finances until partnership is achieved. The implication that single people are unmarried because they are 'unmarriageable' lingers, linking singleness to imperfection and immaturity. The preponderance of female singles generates an implicit construction of single women as particularly (contra Haslam's title) *in*significant.

That matchmaking is considered a responsibility of NFI leaders was evident during a leaders' Prayer and Fasting gathering I attended.[199] Initiatives for training young people as leaders were announced, including the Future Leadership course, a youth leaders' conference and the 'Envision' conference for those in their twenties. Terry Virgo concluded the announcement by adding that because 'we encourage people to marry within the society,' these projects enable people to meet others with 'the same vision.' Within NFI, like most evangelical churches, dating non-believers is discouraged. Marrying, referred to as 'being yoked with', unbelievers is very nearly taboo. Additionally, sexual relationships outside marriage and gay relationships are counted as sinful. NFI's frequent practice of endogamy sets them apart from other evangelicals, who, rather than only marrying within their denomination, would be content with marrying someone from any Protestant denomination. NFI leaders' matchmaking tendencies echo, in slightly muted form, those of Jewish leaders in Lynn Davidman's (1991: 109-116) ethnography of women converting to Orthodox Judaism. Many of these women admitted joining synagogues to find a husband; the matchmaking efforts of Jewish leaders were thought more likely to result in marriage than visits to singles bars in the city many of the women came from. Yet the gender imbalance within evangelical churches, prohibitions around sexual behaviour and the practice of endogamy have not only brought female singleness sharply into focus (Aune 1998, 2002); they have also drastically reduced women's likelihood of finding partners they or NFI consider suitable. Thus NFI's encouragement to marry (and marry satisfactorily) cannot be fulfilled for many, probably most, single women.

Conservative constructions of singleness at Westside

The rest of this chapter concentrates on how singleness is depicted in social interaction at Westside and in interviews. Numerically, single women constituted the largest 'status group', if Westside is split by marital status and gender. As fieldwork began, five out of the twelve people were single women.[200] As I left Westside, attendance had doubled and the number of single women almost tripled: more than half of Westside (fourteen out of

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[199] King's Community Church, Hedge End, Southampton, 7th February 2001.
[200] There were also three married women, three married men and one single man.

twenty-four) were single women.[201] Men formed only one quarter of Westside members. While a gender imbalance exists in most churches and is growing (see Introduction and Literature Review) it is particularly pronounced at Westside.

Although single women were not numerically marginal, the preference for marriage exhibited within church life rendered them marginalised. They existed on the margins of a church whose central positions – officially in official leadership and unofficially as regards social status – were occupied by the married. What occurred in Westside mirrors my earlier research among evangelical women, three-fifths of whom felt the church viewed singleness negatively (Aune 2002: 39-43). A marginal and negative construction of female singleness was observable in social interaction.

Social interaction showed the problematic status Westsiders accorded singleness. On average, someone referred to singleness once or twice per gathering I attended. Singleness was a topic of comment and humour in social situations, yet in the fifteen-month fieldwork period it was never given serious group discussion.[202] Four-fifths of references to singleness accorded it a waiting status, while only a fifth constructed it as positive. Additionally, the fewer ministry opportunities offered to single women in comparison with men and married women reinforced the implication that singleness was an inferior state.

Married and single people considered that single people needed partners, occasionally voicing this directly: Mark said that Eastside, the church some Westside members attended on Sundays before Westside began Sunday services, had a large group of twenty-something singles where 'it's all "we're single for Jesus"' but thought some of them were too picky and should get married. More often the view that single people should marry was expressed obliquely. Jenny often asked the younger single women if they had 'met anyone yet.' Sometimes she and several married people considered aloud whether they knew any suitable men. This attitude was articulated at a service I attended at Eastside. Advertising a Bible study course, for which purchasing books was required, the male course coordinator said:

> We've got a special two-for-one offer for all married or engaged couples, so if one of you comes the other can come as well for no extra, and you can share the book. So that might encourage a few people to get together [congregation laughs]. I'll have to see evidence of commitment, though [congregation laughs again].

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[201] There were also four married women, four married men and two single men.
[202] Neither, though, was marriage.

Before the sermon, the preacher announced that it was time to give the weekly 'offering.'[203] Echoing the earlier comment, he joked:

> While the offering's still going round, let me say there's also a special two-for-one offer for any couples. Everyone has to put five pounds in, and if you're a couple you only need to put in £2.50 each. And if you're single and are going to ask someone out this afternoon – do you hear that you singles at the back? – we'll give you £10. OK? [Congregation laughs].

Here, imaginary financial privileges are announced for couples, ranking 'coupledom' twice as important as singleness. The need for single people to pair up is treated as so urgent that not only would they be required to give less to the church, but they would actually be given money to do so – more than double what a normal single person would be required to donate. Here humour enables the expression of negative attitudes to singleness that could not otherwise be voiced so bluntly.

Like other NFI single women it is unlikely that Westside single women, unless they abandon NFI's marriage advice, will find someone to marry. Their likelihood of marriage is further diminished by Westside's exaggerated gender imbalance. However, in such a context where singleness is conceptualised as marginal, threatening and subversive of gender, women's singleness is not only intensely problematic; it also provides the grounds for intriguing adoptions of feminist critiques, as I will shortly show. How female singleness was 'dealt with' at Westside demonstrates the postfeminist tension between conservative and feminist attitudes.

Members frequently complained, often in jest, about the lack of men at Westside. It is important not to presume a correlation between lack of men and disparaging of women's singleness, for a predominance of women in a religious community could lead to a privileging of the celibate state: the Shakers exemplify this (Kitch 1989: 10). Yet although Westside partly regret lack of men because they would prefer numbers to be more balanced, the primary reason for their concern is that lack of men renders their women unable to marry. Three instances illustrate this.

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[203] NFI members often give a 10% 'tithe' of their income to their local church, in addition to further 'offerings.' Churches vary in their method of eliciting this money, but most pass an 'offering basket' around.

Eight people were present at one evening meeting, of whom only one was male. This prompted one woman to exclaim: 'Poor Harry, he's all on his own.' Harry joked that he enjoyed having 'all my lovely women around me', at which point Lara, the only unmarried woman present who had a boyfriend, countered: 'No, we want more men.' 'Don't be greedy,' Jenny chided, 'You've already got a man!' Jenny's comment demonstrates that, for her at least, lack of men was related to single women's need for partners.

A second incident involved a conversation at a house group that began about Westside's lack of men and turned seamlessly to single women's 'need' for partners:

> Chris: 'Lots of couples meet each other at Stoneleigh.'
> Emma: 'I never have and I always hang round other people's tents.'
> *[Someone suggests a trip to 'Northside' (pseudonym), an NFI church in another city attended by friends of Chris, Sarah and Rachel, who spend several minutes considering which men in that church are still single.]*
> Chris: 'So you want to pair Emma off with all the second class Northside men?…We should give an announcement "Come and join the Westside church plant – there are some single women there"'…
> ?: 'Emma, do you want an artist?'[204]
> Emma: 'No. Definitely not. I want someone with money.'
> Jenny: 'Emma, what were we saying about materialism earlier!'
> Chris: 'What about Alec? He's loaded.'
> Sarah: 'But he's not really on fire for God. He's a Christian but he needs a bit of prodding.'
> Chris: 'He needs to fast for forty days.'
> Rachel: 'You'd better hurry up, Emma. All the best men from Northside are taken.'
> Jenny: 'You shouldn't be so fussy, Emma, I told you.'
> ?: 'In Northside everyone gets married really quickly.'
> Chris: 'When you've been going out six months people start asking you if you're getting married.'
> [Discussion turns to how long married Westside members dated before marrying.]

Emma becomes the focus of group concern as she personalises Chris's comment about Stoneleigh Bible Week by admitting her desire, and failure, to meet a partner there. Emma's openness is not unusual – during my time with them several of the single women talked publicly about wanting to marry. In this incident both single and married people construct singleness as desire for marriage and something to escape, perhaps through others' matchmaking efforts. Marriage normally occurs at a young age and 'really quickly'. Although discernment is needed to ensure women marry men who are financially and

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[204] Emma enjoys painting.

spiritually viable, these concerns are secondary to the overall perception that single women need to find husbands. While those around Emma exhibit benevolent concern for her undesired singleness, their sympathy turns to impatience; those who are married (in Jenny's case, divorced) chide: 'You'd better hurry up,' and 'you shouldn't be so fussy.' Sympathy fast becomes censure.

The third example of a conservative construction of women's singleness occurred when I invited one of the young single women to my house for dinner before the house group meeting. We discussed a questionnaire she had filled in for my (2002) research. Knowledge of evangelicalism's gender imbalance prompted her to comment 'I'd better hurry up if I want to find someone to marry', and ask me at what age 'there stop being available Christian men.' She told me about a friend in her mid twenties whom she described as not ever having been in a relationship, despite being 'very nice, very feminine-looking'. This friend would be upset when she heard about her poor chance of finding a Christian man to marry, she said. The level of panic singleness causes these young evangelical women parallels that revealed in Faludi's (1992: 27-36) work on the US anti-feminist backlash.

The value placed on women's physical beauty has been noted within research on nineteenth-century (Davidoff & Hall 1987: 413-415; Brown 2001: 67-69) and contemporary (Griffith 1997: 141-150) evangelicals; these writers observe that this reflects concerns of their wider cultures. My dinner guest's perception of a link between women's attractiveness and the likelihood of their marriage, shared by Haslam and many young women in general (Holland & Skinner 1987; Holland & Eisenhart 1990: 106), was visible at Westside, where the single women displayed anxiety that their physical appearance was not adequate to attract a man. One evening, one arrived at a group meeting having dyed her hair red. I complimented her, and she replied 'It was supposed to be blonde. I want to be like Barbie.' This was uttered partly in jest, but with the presumed shared cultural understanding, as subsequent banter between us revealed, that women with blonde hair are more attractive to men (Brownmiller 1984: 68-72).

Even when not highlighting it in connection with attracting a man, NFI Christians still considered young women's physical beauty important. At an Eastside service Jane introduced me and another young woman to an older woman, who commented, 'pretty girls.' 'Yes,' Jane replied, 'we've got quite a few babes in Westside. We just need more men.' 'Babe' is early-twentieth-century American slang for a sexually attractive young woman. It

was 'repopularized in the nineties...with an extra emphasis on the element of sexual desirability' (Knowles 1997: 25). While some, particularly feminists, regard 'babe' as belittling (Doyle 1995: 11), Jane appeared untroubled by the term or concept.

In Chapter 7 I discussed Chris' humorous proposal to use photographs of Westside 'girls' to attract men to the church. This has a wider evangelical counterpart in the autumn 2000 advertising campaign for the Alpha course (a missionary initiative designed to attract people to Christianity) featuring the face of an attractive young woman.[205] The use of (often sexualised) images of women is ubiquitous in western advertising. That evangelical Christians advocate the same techniques demonstrates evangelicalism's resemblance to contemporary western consumer culture.

Given their avowed allegiance to the Bible, Westside cannot denigrate singleness unproblematically, for an evangelical commitment to being 'biblical' threatened to obstruct the construction of singleness as transitory, marginal, threatening and subversive of 'correct' separate spheres femininity. Some New Testament passages privilege singleness. Jesus, it seems, remained single and advocated renouncing marriage for the 'kingdom of heaven' (Mtt. 19:10-12), while Paul (1 Cor. 7) regards singleness as a divine 'gift' to be accepted if possible since it enables the bearer to serve God without distractions. Celibacy grew in popularity through the early Christian centuries. By the third century groups like the Syrians saw celibacy as a precondition for baptism and accorded ideological centrality to celibacy and virginity (Ford 1967: 219-222; Ruether 2001: 38). Theologians including Augustine, Jerome and Benedict advocated communal celibacy (Blenkinsopp 1969: 21), and monastic and convent communities developed where male or female celibates dedicated themselves to God's work (Ruether 2001: 55). By the fourth century the presbyter had become priest, his status and function sacralised (Blenkinsopp 1969: 144-166), and a major effort began to 'clericalize sexual continence' (Ruether 2001: 47). Celibacy was increasingly required of priests and bishops, even those already married, particularly in the Western church, whose strict views on clerical celibacy were at odds with the Eastern Churches and was one of the differences cited between Greek Constantinople and Latin Rome in the 'Great Schism' of 1054. From the eighth to the tenth centuries attempts to Christianise marriage largely

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[205] The Alpha course originated at Holy Trinity Church, Brompton, London and was the brainchild of Nicky Gumbel (1993). For sociological analysis of Alpha, see Hunt 2001, 2004. The poster of the woman was featured and discussed in the British evangelical magazine *Christianity* (Anon. 2000).

replaced efforts to impose celibacy on priests, until in the eleventh century the reform movement revived the call for clerical celibacy (Ruether 2001: 48-50). Roman Catholicism has continued to demand celibacy of its priests (Southgate 2001).

Conversely, Protestantism developed in opposition to the Roman Catholic privileging of celibacy. The sixteenth-century Protestant reformers rejected clerical celibacy, seeing celibacy not as holy but as unnatural, precarious, threatening and far from pure. They instead praised marriage as a divine ordinance (Clark & Richardson 1996: 144-145). Within marriage men and women's positions were differentiated. Women were depicted as physically and mentally inferior and in need of a husband's guardianship and rule. Martin Luther considered women's sexual desire so intense that only one in a thousand (later revised to one in a hundred thousand) was able to lead a pure celibate life (Raymond 1986: 73). Monasteries and convents were closed, with many former inhabitants marrying; others, because of choice or circumstance, remained single (Harrington 1995: 48-100). Women's strong sexual desires and natural subordination, it was thought, required their subjection to surveillance, preferably within marriage. If they were unable to find a husband, rather than live alone or with other women they were encouraged to reside within a household headed by a man, under whose 'natural' control they would fall (Wiesner 1990). Suspicion of the threat posed by autonomous single women has been cited as the cause of the witch hunts in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe and America (Gittins 1993: 41; Monter 1977: 133). While women gained affirmation as wives and mothers in the Reformation transition from woman-as-nun to woman-as-wife, many women lost the status the convent had given them as spiritual leaders, workers and members of a sisterhood (Clark & Richardson 1996: 146-147). After the Reformation, the view that marriage was superior to singleness, which in turn was primarily a waiting state, remained, continuing in the Puritanism of John Milton (Clark & Richardson 1996: 169-184).

As evangelical Protestants, NFI are aligned with these denigrations of singleness. Yet they are aware, particularly as a result of recent shifts within wider evangelicalism towards according singleness an equal status (Chilcraft 1993; Wraight 1995; Hsu 1997), of biblical interpretations supporting singleness. My interviews reveal this conflict.

The question 'Which (if either) do you think has greater advantages, being married or being single? What do you think these advantages are?' sought to discover their perceptions of the relative merits of both marital states. More people expressed a preference for marriage.

Seven out of the twenty considered marriage more advantageous, eleven did not state a preference and two favoured singleness. Respondents' gender and marital status bore no relationship to their answers. The majority, whether or not they expressed a preference, pointed out the advantages of both.

A number who believed biblical support existed for elevating singleness tempered it under the practical concerns of those who would rather be married. This is evident from the leader Chris's response:

> My understanding is that that's a biblical principle, you know, it is better – it's Paul, isn't it, that says it's better to be single – um so um, so I think it probably is. But then having said that I think it's really good, it's just fun – it's great to be married um, and I think it's a natural thing and I think, you know, you'd expect for most people to get married in the end.

Chris' juxtaposition of the 'biblical principle' elevating singleness and his own preference for marriage as 'really good', 'natural' and 'fun' is striking and recurred as he continued his answer. His struggle was clear and is manifest in a lengthy response[206] full of contradictions, changes of direction and hesitations ('er', 'um' and repetition of phrases like 'you know', 'I think' and 'so'). He evidently lacked confidence discussing singleness.

Ruth, who has a boyfriend, also struggled to articulate a position that endorsed biblical support for being single but was in keeping with her experiential preference for partnership:

> I'd say marriage has probably got an advantage over singleness, um, just in the sense that you've got, you know, you have a partnership and a relationship that, you know, you can really be supporting one another really closely, maybe having a family and serving God together… But then on the other hand I think, you know, if people are, if God is calling them to be single then, you know, God's gonna bless them. Um, it can still be good for that person in terms of, they can still have those really close friendships, maybe not physical obviously because they're not married, but they can still…I don't think it's, you know, 'oh my gosh, you're single, you know, you don't, you're dead' because, like I, before I was going out with Will, I was single for quite a long time and I really saw the fruits of that in that time of my life.

Although singleness can be a 'calling' and a channel of God's blessings, ultimately it is less satisfying. Ruth acknowledges cultural stereotypes of single women as barren and unfruitful

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[206] Too long to quote in full.

– metaphorically 'dead' – and while she considers these images largely false, she still conceives of singleness as less than ideal.

Other Westside members saw singleness as a melancholy state of wanting to marry. According to Harry: 'if you're single, and especially a single woman I would think, your main aim is to get a man.' He went on to say that the desire for a man experienced by the single Christian women he knew was so great that they could not 'fully concentrate on their Christian walk with God.' Jane attributed to singleness 'greater opportunities for ministry…because you're not distracted by this passion', yet acknowledged: 'I think a lot of singles don't see that as a vision of something to go for and actually there's a lot of sadness and pining and yearning for something they haven't got.' In her study of women in two North American fundamentalist congregations, Brasher (1998: 145) similarly found singleness portrayed as 'not a desirable lifelong option. At best, it is an interim state that, with God's blessing and in accordance with God's timing, is rapidly brought to a close.' Like these women, Westside single women lacked a 'congregational rhetoric' that might enable them to 'pursue a norm of single blessedness.' In the rare occasions where support for singleness was expressed, it was done in modified terms in comparison with Pauline teaching (Brasher 1998: 146-147).

Feminist constructions of singleness at Westside

In three key areas feminist influences are apparent in Westside's construction of female singleness. These are: 1) the view that singleness can be positive; 2) approval of female assertiveness in the search for a husband; 3) single women's support for feminism and feminist values.

1) The view that singleness can be positive

Although the interviews demonstrated a greater preference for marriage, two people said they believed singleness had greater advantages, Chris (whose struggle to reconcile biblical support for singleness with his own preference for marriage I have discussed) and Dawn, a single woman in her twenties. Dawn was enthusiastic:

I think being single has the most awesome advantages than being married, especially if you're a Christian because it means you get to, um, spend a lot more time on God things, like, whether it be, um, getting closer to him or doing his work or whatever, you just have so much more time for that. But if you're married you naturally have to spend more time, invest more time in your relationship and yeah, I think being single has heaps heaps got the advantage over being married. But having said that I know there's a great quote out there that goes, that says something like 'single people and married people pity each other' so it's, I guess, whatever side of the fence you're on, yeah. Definitely. Be single, yay!

While she explains her support for singleness in Christian rather than feminist terms, the feminist attitudes she often expressed suggest a connection between her feminism and her happy singleness.

Jane, who is married, made an explicitly feminist point in answer to the interview question 'Is there anything you think today's society has got wrong in relation to gender or sexual behaviour? (if yes, what?)' 'I think people think you need to have a boyfriend or girlfriend to have some kind of identity and that's just total rubbish,' she said, continuing:

> Even though feminism's broken through, so you get films about people like *Bridget Jones* or *Sex and the City* where they're up there and they're doing big important jobs, at the same time women are also being told that they've got to pine and be romantic and desperately want some man, a relationship with a man, and it's all very confusing for women at the moment I think, I feel very sorry for them [laughs].

Jane here aligns herself with a feminist rejection of the notion that women need male partners, and against notions of singleness as a marginal, waiting state. Significantly, she is aware of the tension in contemporary British notions of singleness that I conceptualise as postfeminist.

Singleness is considered positive insofar as it reinstates the primacy of God in the lives of young women who have placed too much significance on having boyfriends. Drawing on feminist hamartiology (the doctrine of sin) I discern appropriation of feminist insights in NFI's conception that young women's discontent with singleness is sinful. Feminist theologians have critiqued the western church's dominant, Augustinian, definition of sin as pride, arrogance and self-interest on the basis that while it may accurately describe male 'sin', it does not hold for women, 'who in this culture suffer from too little self-esteem, indeed too little self' (Keller 1986: 40). For Valerie Saiving (1960: 109), women's temptations 'are better suggested by such terms as 'triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness;

lack of an organizing center or focus; dependence on others for one's own self definition…in short, underdevelopment or negation of the self'. Judith Plaskow (1980: 3) sees female sin as 'the failure to take responsibility for self-actualization', and Carol Lakey Hess (1997: 142) argues that Protestantism 'enculturates' women 'toward self-loss by repeatedly emphasizing the sin of pride and self-assertion'.[207] Diane Leclerc (2001) argues that while men's predilection is self-idolatry, women are tempted by relational idolatry, the placing of others above their responsibility to God and to a proper sense of self. NFI's understanding of young single women's sin encompasses these feminist insights, enabling young women to reject boyfriends (or desire for boyfriends) in favour of self-actualisation and intimacy with God.

This approach was visible at the '21st Century Girl' seminar for teenage girls at Stoneleigh 2001 (Simpkins 2001), at which two women in their twenties related long 'testimonies' (conversion stories).[208] Both narratives present singleness as a valuable prelude to a God-ordained marriage. In the first, Holly[209] aged 29 told of a childhood of divorce and domestic violence that made her depressed and reliant on astrology and having boyfriends. At 17 she met a Christian who challenged her belief in horoscopes, which prompted her to become a Christian and join an NFI church. Helped by others' prayers, she renounced astrology and her depression disappeared. However, boyfriends were harder to resist, and it took time for Holly to learn instead to place her security in God. To do this, she often repeated Bible verses reminding her that she had self-worth by virtue of her identity as a child of God. At the age of 22, having understood her Christian identity afresh, she married someone from her church youth group. In Holly's story singleness is necessary and significant as a time in which the self can be transformed with God's help. As she accepts that she is God's child her self-worth increases.

Kathy's conversion story was second. Kathy, aged 30, married Phil, 'a gorgeous bloke,' at 27. Like Holly, her parents were divorced. From the age of 16 she went from boyfriend to boyfriend: her insecurity was such that she could not bear being single. She went to university, where she had a 'wild student life', dieting, wearing 'provocative' clothes and occasionally taking drugs. She ended up feeling unhappy and empty. At 23 she attended

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[207] Other feminist theologians critique these analyses' white, middle-class biases (Thistlethwaite 1990: 77-91), propose a broader definition of sin (Heyward 1989) or suggest that women are not sinners but victims of the sin of patriarchy or sexism (Daly 1973).
[208] See Brereton's (1991) work on women's conversion narratives.
[209] Names in this section are pseudonyms.

a gospel concert with a friend at which the preacher appealed to those who wanted to become Christians to come to the front of the room. She went forward because she'd 'tried everything else so I thought I would try God.' Kathy listed two major changes in her life since her conversion: she was able to forgive her father and 'to be single and happy for the first time.' She attributes her ability to be happily single to her 'security in God' and her conviction that God was calling her to singleness for that time:

> I asked God how long I'd be single. He said 'four years'. I thought it was an awful thought. And it was four years to the month that I married Phil. So, if you're thinking you don't want to wait, it's worth it.

Although this seminar presented singleness as temporary, as a time of waiting for God to bring the happy and successful marriage to a 'gorgeous' man he has planned for these young women, the value it gives to singleness, and the relationship between this and feminist theological analysis, remains.

2) Approval of female assertiveness in the search for a husband

The recommendation 'better hurry up' given to Emma by other Westside members (see earlier) accompanies a justification of women searching for marriage partners rather than waiting to be approached. This, in contrast with the separate spheres view that men were responsible for initiating courtship while women's role was to acquiesce or decline (Davidoff & Hall 1987: 324-326), is a partly feminist strategy. It might more appropriately be considered postfeminist because it both concedes the separate spheres view that singleness is unfortunate, yet, in keeping with feminist concerns, allows women an agency they lacked when separate spheres was more commonly accepted.

Although Chris, Westside's leader, believed people should 'really make use of their single years and really enjoy them, not spend the whole time hankering after a partner,' his phrase 'single years' implies a transitory singleness. He also urged pragmatism in seeking partners: 'It gets to the point when you're in your thirties,' he explained, 'where to do some practical things to meet some, some, er, people from the opposite sex is a good thing.' This advice was not gendered but it is legitimate to assume that since most single members of his congregation are female, his recommendation extends to women.

Some Westside single women were explicitly searching for husbands; others were 'keeping their eyes open'. Hoping to meet appropriate men, several attended balls and discos run by an organisation whose director authored an evangelical book encouraging single people to be pragmatic in searching for partners (Gregory 1997). This organisation operates a Christian dating agency and regular singles balls; their prices indicate that they cater mainly for Christians of a high socio-economic status. Although invited to, I did not attend any of these events. During a conversation over a meal I cooked, Lara described to me the events of the Valentine's Day ball she and other women attended. Lara, who went 'not looking for anyone', was introduced to a man, also in his twenties and from an NFI church, whom she began dating and shortly after my fieldwork finished became engaged to. She was the only Westside woman to make a lasting attachment as a result of the ball. Another dated a man for a few weeks. According to Lara's description, the ball and the seduction strategies used by those who attended bore the hallmarks of similar non-Christian balls, bars, nightclubs and discos. Some Westside women were assertive in 'chatting up' men; Lara reported that two of them 'kept bringing blokes back to our table.'

3) Single women's support for feminism and feminist values

Early in my time in Westside, I became conscious not only of the operation of the tension I now call postfeminist, but also of the existence of a conservative-feminist spectrum of attitudes concerning gender. I then realised that those with more feminist attitudes were single women. When my observations and interviews were complete I used the interview responses to map this spectrum diagrammatically. For each question for which this was appropriate I drew a line between two poles I named 'conservative' and 'feminist', adding initials to represent each person's answer. What I discovered confirmed my initial impressions. Of four status groups I designated as married men, married women, single men and single women, single women displayed the most feminist views (expressing attitudes closer to the feminist end of the spectrum than to the conservative end). While not every single woman had feminist views, the majority did, in contrast to a clear minority of other people, whose responses tended towards the traditionalist end of the spectrum. While I had anticipated differences, I was surprised by their extent, not least because this finding contradicted earlier research.

Following Davidman's (1991) depiction of conservative Orthodox Jewish single women, Brasher (1998) and Franks (2001) suggest that single religious women are more likely to display conservative attitudes than their married counterparts. In their research on attitudes to marriage amongst fundamentalist Christian women, Brasher and Franks argue that single women are more likely to favour female submission and male authority. Brasher finds that while married women 'discuss marriage in relatively egalitarian terms, describing submission in soft-order language as a mutual dynamic…single female believers depicted marriage in the hard-order language of male dominance'. She offers a 'tentative hypothesis':

> hard-order metaphors may function as a critical trope in dating and courtship language, exhibiting a female believer's readiness for an ordered marital tie. But once marriage occurs and an actual marital relationship is underway, the hard-order discourse of courtship gets overwritten by lived experiences. (Brasher 1998: 154)

Franks' (2001: 87-88) study allows for exceptions to this; she met at least one single woman who said she would only marry if she found a man who wanted an egalitarian relationship.

It is undoubtedly true that some British single evangelical women articulate strong opinions in favour of male-only church leadership and male-led marriage (Aune 1998: 39-43, 2002: 30; Franks 2001: 87). But findings from Westside reveal that single women are consistently more likely to express open, egalitarian attitudes than their married or male counterparts. Of the four status groups, single women were the most likely to assert that there should be no difference between male and female roles in society, marriage and the family or the church. They were more likely to favour allocating church roles on the basis of individual gift rather than gender. They were also less likely to believe that there should be a definable difference between Christian ideals of masculinity and femininity.[210]

The only exceptions to the trend of single female egalitarianism were Emma and Marion, whose responses ranked among the most conservative. Significantly, at the time of interview Emma and Marion were the single women with the most noteworthy leadership positions in Westside, Emma being the key 'worship leader' and Marion overseeing the house groups. Two possible explanations for this exist: either church leaders choose to give leadership roles to women who align themselves most strongly with NFI's often gender-

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[210] Because only two single men were interviewed it is not possible to generalise about single men's attitudes. These two men were less egalitarian than single women but slightly less conservative than married people.

differentiated theological anthropology, and thus are seen to be submissive and obedient to authority. Alternatively, these two women's achievement of leadership roles has removed their need for an egalitarian philosophy – in other words, they can gain authority without needing to struggle (as feminists) for it; they benefit from a residual feminism in NFI – tokenism, perhaps – that tolerates a few women's prominence.

Bernice Lott (1990), Stephanie Riger (2000) and Rachel Hare-Mustin and Jeanne Marecek (1990) note the tendency of those who lack status and power to express egalitarian attitudes. Carol Gilligan (1982) sees this in terms of gender, showing that while men tend to have an 'ethic of fairness' whereby they conceive of moral choices as a matter of rights and rules, women possess an 'ethic of care' located in relationships with others. This means women are more egalitarian than men. Countering this view, Lott, Riger and Hare-Mustin and Marecek suggest instead that egalitarianism is associated not necessarily with gender, but rather with low-status positions (which are more often held by women). Those possessing high status will more likely favour rules and hierarchies, while those who lack status express communalistic and relational values in order to survive. Evidence from Westside supports this thesis and the earlier contention that single women are the most marginalised status group. Single women are egalitarian because they know, consciously or unconsciously, that separate spheres, gender-differentiated attitudes are responsible for their marginalisation.

So far, single women's feminism appears to represent the liberal strand that argues for equal rights and opportunities for men and women within existing church structures. However, further evidence suggests these women's alignment with a more radical feminism. Two aspects are worthy of mention: their evident experience of female solidarity, and their wish to challenge church structures.

Sisterhood is a concept diffused throughout feminism, especially radical feminism (Morgan 1970, 1985). At Westside it was single women who most appeared to experience and enjoy female solidarity, sometimes to the exclusion of men. The Christian concept of spiritual family facilitates this, and while Westside members do not call each other 'sister' or 'brother' a shared understanding of spiritual kinship pervades the group. Practical concerns with spouses and children meant that married couples had less time available for socialising with other Westside members. As a result, single women socialised with each other. As a single woman myself, I felt at my most relaxed at Westside when having a meal and sharing jokes with other single women.

Unlike the sisterhood Dachang Cong (1998) describes amongst Indianan Amish single women that supports men's authority and the dominant construction of singleness as marginal and negative, Westside single women's sisterhood was sometimes subversive. Single-women-only environments were safe spaces for women to express frustration about the pressure others placed on them to find partners, where they could resist unwelcome definitions of them as incomplete. They were sources of strength and provided opportunities to exercise spiritual leadership. The single-women-only house group that began towards the end of my fieldwork under Jenny's leadership proved beneficial to quieter women who were less confident in mixed house groups. This group supported Jenny's more overt feminist challenge and regarded her as a kind of spiritual mother/wise aunt/older sister.

Single women exhibited antagonism towards NFI structures. They were more likely to favour flexibility, following the Holy Spirit and fostering close relationships between church members than relying on rules and strategies; I heard several of them make comments suggesting disrespect for established, rational, hierarchical ways of working. During a conversation at a local pub, several of the single women discussed their fears about challenging church leadership. One said she 'felt bad' because she regularly challenged the way Westside was led. Another explained her fear that, as happened in her previous church, church leaders depended upon methods and strategies of business and commerce rather than on the Holy Spirit. At a whole-church meeting shortly before my fieldwork was complete, Chris announced that the NFI regional leaders overseeing Chris' leadership of Westside were not 'keen on' Westside's idea of beginning public meetings on Sundays because they felt there were insufficient numbers to justify public meetings. Chris announced his intention to follow this advice and delay such meetings. Those present appeared disappointed. 'If we submit to authority God'll give us more authority,' Chris explained. At this point, Alison challenged: 'but what if we don't want to submit to their authority?' Chris did not answer directly, and no one else confronted him.

Westside single women's feminist values align them attitudinally with a longer historical relationship between single evangelical women and feminism. Evangelical single women played a large part in western first-wave feminism (Banks 1981; Hardesty 1984; Rendall 1985: 322-323) and were involved in the evangelical form of second-wave feminism. Yet Westside women are reluctant to identify themselves as feminists. This attitude, common among British women today, is a noticeable feature of postfeminism. If

feminism is feature of the historical past, if it has been rendered less or un- necessary as a result of feminist advances, if it is understood to have harmed women's cause (as the backlash strand argues), it is no longer possible to identify as feminist. Yet as well as these attitudes postfeminism encompasses continuing support for feminist goals, and Westside's single women adhere to these. Westside women's rejection of the tag 'feminist' should also be explained with reference to their allegiance to NFI, a movement closely identifiable as part of a post-1970s backlash against feminism. While as NFI believers they endorse a backlash rejection of feminism, as women who have grown up in a social context (late twentieth-century Britain) where feminist beliefs have been articulated, they are also heirs to, and benefit from, a feminist philosophical heritage. Westside single women do not identify as feminists, yet they nevertheless negotiate their church lives in feminist ways. 'I am not a feminist but', the identifying slogan of postfeminist British women (cf. Stacey's [1998: 19] 'I'm not a women's libber, but…'), is shared, albeit more cautiously, by these single evangelical women today.

Conclusions

Westside exhibit a postfeminist combination of feminist and conservative attitudes to singleness. The separate spheres belief that women need husbands to attain 'full' femininity, that men should initiate relationships and women should respond, and that singleness is therefore a transitory, marginal, threatening, waiting state is stronger than any challenge to it. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the degree to which NFI locate 'proper' femininity (and, to a lesser degree, masculinity) in gender-differentiated roles in marriage and the nuclear family. Yet this less positive notion of singleness does not exclusively hold sway. It has been joined, particularly in NFI's local settings, by more positive configurations of female singleness, including appreciation of singleness as enabling women to develop themselves spiritually, support of women's assertiveness in initiating dating relationships and a female solidarity that enables the subversion of oppressive features of church life. But, as I shall discuss in the Conclusion, given the departure of most of the single women from Westside after the official end of my fieldwork, some of them in search of men to marry, I suggest that

NFI and Westside have not succeeded in creating a version of singleness that will satisfy single women.

Conclusion

Reflections on leaving NFI and summary of findings

It was a summer evening and one of my last Westside meetings. The spacious lounge Westside had hired in a local hotel felt warm, and a welcome draught was coming through the window near my chair. The fifteen at this monthly 'altogether meeting' were in good spirits. We shared someone's birthday cake, baked by Marion. Marion and Harry described their 'vision' for their new house groups, Ruth introduced the forthcoming Alpha course and Rachel explained her and Simon's desire to spend more time evangelising their friends. In the last few minutes, Jenny told us how a chance meeting in her street with some American missionaries delivering videos about Jesus had led to a request from several local women (as yet non-believers) that Jenny begin a Bible study group for them.[211] Those present seemed excited by the prospect of conversions. 'I just want to get on my knees before God,' Chris exclaimed, prompting people to kneel and pray for Jenny's neighbours and the church.

In Jenny's car on the way home a problem arose. Neither Jenny nor the two other women who volunteered to help with the group knew how to lead Bible studies. I was the only person Jenny could think of who could. Jenny had once heard me lecture and was convinced that I was an appropriate person. So would I do it, she asked? I had explained weeks before that I would be leaving Westside that summer when I had completed the interviews. But out of a sense of duty to Jenny, who had been a source of support throughout my time at Westside, I felt unable to decline. Instead I said I would pray about it (a strategy that was both genuine and methodologically necessary).[212]

Very little is written about the process of ethnographic disengagement (J. Lofland & L. Lofland 1995: 61-63; Snow 1980)[213] or how relations with group members may be continued when fieldwork is officially over (Gallmeier 1983). Not only did I feel a duty to

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[211] Chapter 5 relates some of this incident.

[212] Warnings against long-term personal involvement in the group permanently are common in methodological literature but are critiqued in Alison Lurie's (1967) novel *Imaginary Friends*, Karen McCarthy Brown's (1999) account of participating in Vodou and Kulick & Wilson's (1995) work on sexual relationships in the field.

[213] Snow (1980) helpfully details major precipitants (e.g. theoretical saturation, obligations to academic institution, completion of research agenda) and impediments (e.g. emotional proximity, guilt, group policy towards defection) to leaving.

Jenny, I also felt a strong enough attachment to Westside to contemplate, for about a fortnight, becoming a member. I had spent an evening with them nearly every week for fifteen months. I had 'hung out' with them, celebrated their birthdays and prayed about their problems. I experienced the ties that bind members of evangelical communities: the intimate sharing of life, the regularity of social relations and the ability of these to be – surprisingly or routinely – broken into by what they believe to be the Holy Spirit. I spent longer with them than with many of my friends and family. They cared about me and I about them.

To leave Westside so reluctantly shows how far they had become part of my life and I of theirs. It shows the power of what anthropologist Victor Turner calls 'communitas'.[214] It also cuts to the heart of the gender debate. Though the conservative beliefs present in NFI are hard for someone with my feminist predilections to stomach, the power of communitas is such that those a group marginalises still often choose, in the short-term, to remain. Women engage in a 'trade-off' in order to gain what in contemporary individualized urban Britain is rarely found outside one's blood relatives: a day-to-day experience of belonging, connectedness, friendship, family, security. I understood how in this intimate environment decisions are made to stay despite difficulties, disagreements and marginality. I saw how gender traditionalism (which approximates in my analysis and some women's experiences to oppression) can be moderated by feminist resistances and unconscious adoptions of feminist ideals. But I also guessed that these manifestations of feminism helped to sustain the oppression they paralleled, for they rendered NFI *not bad enough* to leave. I would not have understood this had I not become so involved at Westside, would not have grasped the contradictions and struggles of negotiating gender that evangelical Christians face had I not – in some small way – lived them myself.

The trade-off NFI women are temporarily willing to make in enduring discursive and material oppression is not unique to religious women. Likewise, unlike analyses that read evangelicals' conservatism as oppositional to feminist 'secular' society, I do not consider contemporary Britain egalitarian. Britain and evangelical churches are generally both feminist and traditionalist. The postfeminist tension is present within both church and

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[214] Turner (1969: 127-129) argues that during ritual (especially rites of passage), social structure is transcended and temporarily replaced by 'communitas': a heightened sensation of sociality in which boundaries are broken and the more usual differentiation between humans disappears. Turner sees a dialectic operating. Periods of anti-structure are necessary for social groups to be revitalised, yet these give way to a need for structure. In religious or political movements, heightened communitas can lead to exaggerated bureaucratisation or over-tight structures, Turner argues.

society, and as such is impossible to escape. Leaving the church does not mean leaving behind sexism (Webster 1995: 163-185). The substitutions NFI women make are part of life in late-modern, postfeminist Britain. Women forgo liberation – or, more accurately, are required to forgo it – and settle for what is available. Women become stay-at-home mothers not because they want to give up paid work but because the occupational structure and access to affordable childcare are inadequate; women settle for less-than-ideal partnerships because singleness is disparaged and isolating. NFI may be more conservative about gender than the 'average' British person – certainly more ideologically – but they articulate postfeminist beliefs and live postfeminist lives not unlike their non-religious peers.

The relationship of my findings to previous work in this area can be discussed with reference to the four existing frameworks of analysis introduced in my Introduction and Literature Review. What I call the 'conservative-egalitarian' framework, which is often used, remains useful, notwithstanding my critique of its notion that contemporary society is egalitarian; as this thesis shows, NFI utilise and amalgamate conservative and feminist ideas and practices. Useful also are 'plural typologies' that depict plural gender ideologies operating; my study confirms this but goes further and is more specific when it links these discourses to those of contemporary Britain.

The preceding chapters have sought to demonstrate how NFI are positioned in relation to contemporary British postfeminism. Examining church life, marriage, masculinity and women's singleness I have argued that since NFI draw on British postfeminist notions of gender, in particular amalgamating separate spheres and feminist understandings and practices of gender, they can be identified as postfeminist. The extent to which NFI use contemporary ('secular') British resources and discourses concerning gender is striking. It shows up as tenuous their claim to derive their gender ideals from the Bible. What is instead going on is a kind of accommodation to the gender ideas of their culture – a culture that is neither wholly conservative nor wholly feminist but instead incorporates conservative and feminist aspects into a sort of postfeminist amalgam. NFI make much use of the Bible. But, although they would vehemently deny this and claim to be 'biblical', they interpret the Bible through the gendered lenses of their culture. This is not to ignore Christianity and the church's influence in shaping the gender discourses of British culture, for particular theological understandings have shaped the cultural patterns I am here framing as secular – separate spheres, feminism and the anti-feminist backlash are not without Christian

influence. However, as they have been taken up by a non-churchgoing constituency and asserted without recourse to theological justification they may be labelled cultural rather than Christian.

I have further shown that NFI's adherence to separate spheres and backlash manifestations of gender is stronger than their support for feminist ones. In their major public settings they espouse male church authority, reserving major leadership and preaching positions for men. While a few women (mainly leaders' wives) gain public profiles, they are hampered by prohibitions against women's leadership and discourses that cast women's authority as rebellious and sinful. And though feminist discourse has filtered down, producing official claims to 'release' women, men almost entirely dominate writing, seminar-leading and prophetic roles. Locally, if Westside may be seen as representative, men similarly hold all major long-term leadership roles. They also take proportionally over three times as many leadership and teaching opportunities in house groups as women. Although more Westside members than not favour male church leadership, a number argue for equality in ministry and almost all seem eager that individuals use their gifts and talents in church. Unlike in wider NFI settings, women are able to exert considerable authority as they prophesy to others. In local settings women are more able to challenge gender inequalities. While they win few battles and no wars, they can make small spaces to exercise their ministry.

NFI's attitudes to and lived experiences of marriage frequently combine separate spheres ideology with more feminist practice; each of the many manifestations of headship, submission and intimate mutuality depict this tension between older conservatism and newer egalitarianism. As regards masculinity, conservative attitudes to fatherhood (fathers are encouraged to take authority, provide financially for their families and eschew absence) are moderated somewhat, especially in NFI's local settings, by support for new, feminist calls for men's involvement in childcare. NFI's discourse of fathering is, however, primarily aligned with the backlash. Their stance on men's sexuality is particularly conservative. Men repudiate homosexuality as a way of establishing their heterosexual masculinity and work hard to guard against the wayward sexual desires they believe plague men. Only a few more feminist women countenance non-marital expression of sexuality.

If sexually faithful married men represent a gender ideal for NFI, single women do not, and NFI adhere to a conservative construction of singleness as marginal. However,

parallel with a British postfeminist approval of women's assertiveness in initiating relationships with men, NFI are beginning to permit single women agency to find routes out of singleness. Other feminist understandings of singleness as spiritually beneficial also exist, though singleness remains a state of 'waiting not to be [single]' (Aune 2002: 23). But if many in NFI are ideologically non-feminist, single NFI women possess the most egalitarian attitudes. Feminists without the label, they band together to support each other and enact small resistances against their largely gender-traditional church.

NFI are not monolithic. Their local settings are less conservative and more feminist than their wider and national settings. Nowhere in NFI are women overall church leaders. Nowhere do they gain as many leadership opportunities as men. Yet it was at a local congregation, Westside,[215] that I witnessed women leading house groups and Bible studies and giving talks. It was at Westside that I saw something close to equality in the practice of prophesying. It was at and through Westside that I met those opposed to NFI's prohibition against women's leadership, those who believed marriage should be a partnership of mutual submission, those more tolerant than NFI leaders of non-marital family or sexual relationships.

Moreover, conservative gender ideology is sometimes diluted in social practice, which goes some way to supporting what I consider the third dominant framework for understanding evangelical gender relations, 'symbolic traditionalism and pragmatic egalitarianism'. Westside members may say they believe men and women should have different roles in marriage, but their often-egalitarian marriages belie the beliefs they claim to hold. The reverse is also true: NFI claim to 'release' women to exercise their gifts and talents fully in church when in fact they constrain them through prohibitions against female elders, neglect of women's talents and a greater emphasis on developing men's leadership skills.

As my review of its different interpretations shows (Chapter 3), postfeminism is a broad concept able to incorporate varying degrees of conservatism or feminism. While I do not want to over-typologise postfeminism (contra Projansky's [2001] multiple versions), it is not sufficient merely to label NFI 'postfeminist'. NFI's postfeminism is primarily backlash postfeminism. Starting their churches in the 1970s, in the wake of the radical and counter-cultural movements that profoundly challenged British structures and conventions, the

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[215] Notwithstanding that fact that, as I discuss in Chapter 2, Westside is likely to be more liberal than an 'average' NFI congregation.

Restorationist evangelicals who are now NFI aligned themselves against feminism and sexual liberalism. Fuelled by the rise of New Right Thatcherism from 1979 and experiencing most growth in the 1980s, they sought, like other New Right supporters, a return to the middle-class separate spheres family. More recently (though less vociferously than at first) NFI reasserted their gender-differentiated theology in opposition to the 1980s and 1990s evangelical feminist movement.

Masculinity is key to their backlash postfeminism. With the New Right and other anti-feminists post-1979 who believed men had been discriminated against, NFI argued that men and masculinity were of prime importance in restoring God's design for church life. Seeking to overcome an imagined masculinity 'crisis', NFI have worked hard to call men to 'be men'. They persuade men to lead their wives and children. They give men authority as leaders and preachers in church. They claim that their more gender-balanced ratios are a sign of their success in attracting men. In creating a version of masculinity as leadership they believe they restore men to their God-ordained destiny.

Yet the corollary of this emphasis on masculinity is an erasure of women's visibility and importance. It is arguable that although separate spheres ideology restricts and stereotypes, it allows women a distinctive sphere of activity (albeit a subordinate one). NFI's emphasis on masculinity has, however, minimised emphasis on femininity so that instead of having a clearly delineated sphere, women in NFI are positioned as passive, even absent. Since masculinity is central to NFI's identity, women are marginal. Their marginality is discursive and practical: they are less often preached or written about and they have far fewer opportunities to exercise their talents in building the church and serving its mission. Even areas traditionally gendered feminine, like tea making and childcare, are being taken over by men, who are encouraged to extend their leadership to all areas of life.

This is not to say that NFI could survive without women. Representing slightly over half NFI's membership, women are vital. They are NFI's core attendees, most faithful prayers, administrators, singers, children's workers and babysitters, providers of hospitality, pioneers in social action and counselling and sacrificial givers. Yet they are constructed as less important than men.

Considerable numbers of NFI women and a few men recognise this. I admire those I got to know who understood and tried – however tentatively – to challenge women's marginalisation. Women like Jenny, Alison and Dawn from Westside may not have been

holding protests outside Terry Virgo's house or organising campaigns for women's leadership and preaching. They do not even, except as a kind of guilty secret, call themselves feminists. Yet they are doing feminist work. If feminism is an 'interruptive strategy' (Smyth 2002), they are interrupting the general proceedings of NFI. While the course of events since finishing my fieldwork indicates that this 'softly softly' strategy is unlikely to bring significant change to the construction of gender in NFI, these NFI women (and occasionally men) manifest what occurs globally in the face of injustice: resistance. The presence of these egalitarians in a conservative evangelical movement like NFI is also testimony to the durability and transferability of feminism in Britain today. As Stacey and Gerard (1990: 99) remark in the American context, if feminism has permeated a group regarded by many feminists as 'the vanguard of the anti-feminist backlash' it suggests the enormity of feminist influence on culture and society.

What I have learned since leaving Westside has underscored my observation that NFI's postfeminism is more conservative than that of mainstream British society. Contrary to my initial, more optimistic interpretation in which I considered it possible, even likely, that the influence of feminist women would lead Westside, and NFI in general, to become more egalitarian, I no longer believe feminist understandings will take the ascendancy in NFI. I have become aware that while some women of feminist outlook sacrifice equality for security or community and decide to remain within NFI, this is a short-, not long-term, solution. In the long-term, the 'cognitive dissonance' (Festinger et al. 1956; Festinger 1957) these women and few men concerned about gender equality have to cope with to remain in NFI, is too great to sustain. Having either to buckle under NFI's primarily conservative ideology and practice or leave to find a less oppressive expression of church, most of those with feminist inclinations do the latter.

Just months before the submission of this thesis 'Margaret', an NFI woman I interviewed at Stoneleigh, emailed me. When we had met three years before she had described her gentle but constant fight for women to be allowed to preach. An evangelical 'feminist' of the reformist kind, she had nevertheless told me, 'I don't want to see women sidelined in favour of men just because they're women. I'll do an Emmeline Pankhurst if necessary in order to see women's issues not sidelined.' Part of NFI for twenty years, married to an elder and apparently happy with its prohibition against female elders (it was preaching she wanted women's access to) I had assumed Margaret firmly ensconced in NFI.

Yet three years later she wrote to tell me she and her husband had left NFI to go to a church where men and women are given 'equal responsibilities and honour'. She wondered how my work was going, and if she could read it; she felt that I had discerned 'a lack of respect towards women in the church', she told me. When her husband had stepped down from the leadership team, Margaret's own activities (occasional preaching, house group leadership and counselling) were 'slowly but surely withdrawn' by the leaders. Having left NFI, she explained, 'it is such a relief not to feel I have to defend the NFI position any more.'[216]

A month later, I regained contact with an elder from another part of the country who I had interviewed several years previously. To my great surprise, he and his family had also left NFI. I asked why. Although he did not want his story described, fearing identification, he consented to my mentioning that he had departed largely because his NFI overseers would not countenance his more gender-egalitarian views.

When I returned to Westside two and a half years after leaving it (as I describe below), my biggest surprise was discovering that only three of the fourteen single women who had been members in the latter part of my fieldwork remained. Two of these, Ruth and Karen, were no longer single, having married men who now belonged to the church. Most of the other eleven had, like Dawn and Jenny, moved to other towns or churches (in two cases, other countries). Several had left to attend larger, non-NFI churches in search of eligible single men. Marion and Emma, long-term NFI members who as much as women were able had held valuable leadership roles, had considered finding a husband a greater priority than supporting NFI. Several had married or formed relationships with men who were from other churches or were not Christians. It was hard not to see this as reinforcing my finding that single women were marginalised in Westside and NFI, hard not to conclude that this exodus of single women signified that Westside had been neither a positive or affirming place for them.

Margaret's, the elder's and the Westside single women's departures are not, I believe, coincidental. Rather, they are indicative of what occurs when people try, in feminist manner, to subvert NFI's conservatism. Although NFI are postfeminist, theirs is a conservative postfeminism that does not countenance long-term or structural feminist challenge from within their ranks. To use terms suggested by the fourth dominant framework employed to analyse evangelical gender practices, that of empowerment/oppression or structure/agency,

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[216] Emails from Margaret, 13th and 29th June 2004.

theirs is a structure in which some have more power than others, and those 'others' are oppressed. Empowerment-focused analysts often also note that resistance goes hand in hand with oppression; those who challenged NFI or departed epitomise this resistance. Whether or not their departure signals success (if women develop stronger feminist identities) or failure (if they feel their challenge falls on deaf ears and departure is the only option) depends on one's perspective.

The departure of the more egalitarian raises serious questions about NFI's claim to be particularly successful in attracting men and achieving gender-balanced attendance. It is not, I believe, that men are especially attracted to NFI; it is rather that women are repelled and leave. During my fieldwork I met other women and a few men, whose voices I do not include in this account, who had left NFI because they disliked their views about women.[217] For them NFI did seem to signify 'No Females Included'.

Directions for future research

This thesis has had to exclude or minimise a number of key themes that I suggest need further work. First, while this thesis has looked at femininity as a subset of singleness and marriage, more detailed exploration of NFI's – and other British evangelicals' – constructions of femininity is necessary. While NFI's concept of femininity is less developed than that of masculinity and thus is less vital to this thesis, I suggest their constructions of motherhood and women's physical appearance are worth particular investigation.

Second, more work is needed on evangelical makings of masculinity in the British context. Because masculinity has been neglected in research on gender and evangelicalism, it should be made a key concern in future research in this field. It is not, however, that more research on men is needed; as feminist scholars often claim, most knowledge is 'androcentric' or 'phallocentric', with men as both subjects and objects of study and 'men's experiences and priorities being seen as central and representative of all' (Robinson 1997: 2). My request is not for more work on men, but for more work on men *as* men, more exploration of how, why and with what resources evangelical men (and also women)

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[217] Furthermore, I met no men who indicated that NFI's stance on gender was what attracted them to NFI.

construct masculinity. Sociologist R. W. Connell's work on hegemonic masculinity may be particularly usefully applied, I suggest (Carrigan et al. 1987; Connell 1987, 1995, 2002).

A third area needing development concerns Christian constructions of masculinity and the gender imbalance in churchgoing in Britain. Men are less likely than women to go to church and express Christian beliefs (Simmons & Walter 1988; Walter 1990; Davie 1994; Kay & Francis 1996: 10-16; Walter & Davie 1998; Brown 2001), and I suggest that empirical research is needed on the relationship between gender, churchgoing and Christian belief. Lack of space prevented exploration of this with reference to NFI, but it seems likely that there is a connection between cultural constructions of masculinity – notably, I would argue, the influence of separate spheres discourse which positioned Christianity as unmasculine – and rates of male churchgoing.

Fourth, through taking a standpoint concerned particularly with the location and marginalisation of single women, I have shown in this thesis how gender is cross-cut by other social locations. More work is needed on the intersections between Christian constructions of gender and of ethnicity, youth, class and ability/disability, to name but a few key areas of personal and social identity.

This is not a call to eschew investigations focused around gender. At a time when attention to how churches deal with matters traditionally considered 'personal' is taken up with issues around sexuality, I suggest a focus should be kept on gender. While disputes reign in the Church of England over whether homosexual men should be able to become bishops, no *women* (of any sexuality) may do so. It is important that this numerically larger group – women – is also kept at the forefront of investigations of marginalisation and oppression in contemporary Christianity.

Finally, this thesis has implications for general feminist and sociological work on postfeminism. Although some work has begun to explore how the term postfeminism is and should be deployed, detailed theorising is needed, particularly in the British context. I suggest that material from Chapter 3 might form the basis for further theoretical work on postfeminism.

Return to Westside

Two and a half years after I left, I was reunited with many of those I had known at Westside. During the interim I had stayed loosely in contact with Jenny, whose outspoken, feminist views I had warmed to and who I felt closest to. She had returned to the town where she had lived before moving to help start Westside. Dawn had also moved there, having got a job working on a homelessness project run by an NFI church there. When visiting Jenny for a weekend, I had a meal with Jenny, Dawn and Alison, another of the single women who had moved away from Westside when she got a job elsewhere. At once the warmth and solidarity I had felt with those women returned. 'I've got a question for you', Dawn said as I got into Alison's car after they met and hugged me at the station. 'What do you think about using "Ms" rather than "Miss"?' Dawn and Alison had been discussing this because Alison's group of male friends from her new NFI church had vehemently disapproved when Alison told them she had begun sometimes to call herself 'Ms'. These young men had told her 'Ms' was only for old, ugly women, she explained, and she wanted backing in her preference for 'Ms'. I explained that I used 'Ms', taking a feminist view that women should not have to be identified according to whether or not they were somebody's wife when men faced no such title distinction. They agreed. Dawn remarked that one of her single, female, Christian friends who had decided to embrace singleness as a chosen, positive, adult status, rather liked 'Miss', seeing it as a reclamation of a previously denigrated, infantilised status. I thought of some of the young, non-Christian feminists I knew who had similarly reclaimed 'girl' culture[218] and noted how similar their views were to Dawn and Alison's, these younger women with feminist views who did not use for themselves the term 'feminist' because of its negative connotations amongst their evangelical peers.

The next day I returned to Westside. Dawn and I took the train and walked to the school hall where Westside now met. I was expecting the noise of exuberant singing and dynamic prayer. But as I walked in the singing was quiet, even struggling. Few people (fifteen to twenty adults and seven children) were in the cold hall; it looked too large for such a group. Flasks of coffee stood at the back next to trays of Danish pastries and croissants – too many to feed those present. Several turned and smiled or waved to Dawn and me.

After several songs, led by Jane on piano and Karen on vocals, Simon came to the microphone and shared a prophecy he thought God might have given him for the church. 'Of

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[218] I refer to young women involved with the Riot Grrrl movement, the Ladyfest festivals and other young feminist networks. See Harris 2003, 2004 and Baumgardner & Richards 2000: 126-166.

course, I might have got it wrong, you'll have to weigh it up for yourselves,' he added. He spoke about science laboratories and metals that separate when heated, comparing this to God's process of refining people. Since they began Westside they had not seen the growth they anticipated, he said. They had worked hard to put on Alpha courses and structure meetings to appeal to outsiders, but the church had not grown. Yet, Simon explained, what had occurred was a refining of Westside members' characters. People had become more spiritually mature, and perhaps this was as or more important than numerical growth. Perhaps God was waiting for them to mature before bringing the numerical growth they wanted, he suggested. Simon seemed quieter, more humble than I remembered him.

Simon asked Dawn, who was leaving her job at the homelessness project, to tell the congregation what she had learned over the two years. She spoke about her growth in knowing God, her Christian commitment to love the residents of the hostel where she worked even though the miraculous healings from drug addictions she prayed they would receive rarely happened. Her joyful enthusiasm seemed strangely out of place.

Mark then came to the front and gave a talk about God's jealousy, tracing through the Bible examples of God's love for humanity and desire that they enjoy a close and open relationship with him, forsaking other 'idols'. Applying his theme to Westside, Mark read from John's letter to the Ephesian church in the book of Revelation (2:1-7). John praises the church for their hard work, yet, as if speaking for God, Mark explained, John judges the church lukewarm because its members had not retained personal wholehearted devotion to God. The Ephesian church had relied on good deeds and lost the heart of relationship with God and as a result was in danger of being closed down. Mark hypothesised that Westside could be in a similar state. Perhaps Westside had not grown because they had relied on hard work and lost their intimacy with God. Perhaps God might, too, close Westside down. After Mark's sermon Simon announced that those who wanted to should go to one side of the room and pray for Dawn. Remembering Westside's enthusiasm for praying, I anticipated that most people would do so. Ten minutes after the service, I realised (probably to Dawn's disappointment) that nobody had.

The service ended and I chatted to Mark, Jane, Karen and Chris. All were welcoming and asked how I was. Some things had continued as I would have predicted: the progression of their careers, the birth and growth of children. But their mood had substantially changed. I remembered much hope, much confidence and little apparent suffering. What I found was

nearly the reverse. They were subdued, quiet, sad, almost chastened. Although new people had joined Westside, more had left; the church had shrunk rather than grown.

But despite this sadness I felt great affection for them. I told Chris about my Ph.D. and the tension I had found between assertion of male headship and its moderation through equality rhetoric. 'Well that's not surprising', he said, 'we're just trying to do our best to make sense of how to understand the Bible in our culture.' And that is, after all, what they were doing. If numerical growth is anything to go by, they failed. If love and humility are what count, they achieved some success. If empowerment for women or freedom from gender-based restrictions are important, they would be found considerably wanting. While they embraced aspects of feminist critiques of separate spheres ideology, while they took account of their place in late-modern, postfeminist Britain and 'tried their best' to live as faithful Christians, this required women to pay a greater price than men. And yet their postfeminism may be only a little more gender-restrictive than that found amongst many other social groups in Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In response to the discussions about whether evangelicalism may empower or oppress women that occupy many who study evangelical gender practices, arguments can be made for both. My findings suggest that NFI oppresses more than it liberates. Approaching this study from a single Christian feminist standpoint, I do not believe that NFI congregations enable women to reach their potential as valuable human beings. Yet it is very hard to name an institution – religious or otherwise – that facilitates what feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether has called the 'full humanity of women'. Indeed, Ruether (1983: 18-20) suggests that the meaning of women's 'full humanity' is elusive because it has never been achieved and is only known through its negative – the 'denigration and marginalization of women's humanity' – and through glimpses as women's denigration and marginalisation are, in small ways, challenged and overturned.

But people change, evangelicals and NFI included. As many of the quotations from Westside members in this thesis indicate, attitudes and practices shift, are uncertain, are capable of change. Whether ideologically feminist, conservative or, most often, postfeminist, contemporary evangelicals are, with the rest of society, negotiating their gender ideologies and practices. To use Chris and Ruth's term, they are 'grappling with' gender and how to understand it in the light of the Bible. 'We're all trying to be like Jesus,' Jenny explained, 'and so we just have to, you know, work out our lives as we interpret that, each one of us'.

And as Chris told me when I returned to visit Westside: 'we want to be normal people doing normal jobs and living normal lives, but also being Christians.'

Appendix 1

Interview questions asked to Westside members

1. Do you think the roles of men and women are different in the Bible? (if yes, in what ways?)

2. Do you think men and women should have different roles in:

a) society (if yes, what should the differences be?)

b) the family and marriage (if yes, what should the differences be?)

c) the church? (if yes, what should the differences be?)

3. Do you think there are any differences between men and women other than physical or biological differences? (if yes, what are they?)

4. Do you think Christian masculinity should be different from Christian femininity? (if so, in what ways?)

5. Which (if either) do you think has greater advantages, being married or being single? What do you think these advantages are?

6. Would you ever consider it acceptable for a Christian to be involved in a homosexual sexual relationship? (if yes, under what circumstances?)

7. Would you ever consider it acceptable for a Christian to be involved in a heterosexual sexual relationship outside marriage? (if yes, under what circumstances?)

8. Is there anything you think today's society has got wrong in relation to gender or sexual behaviour? (if yes, what?)

9. Why do you think more women than men are involved in churches?

10. What do you think could be done to attract more men to church?

11. How do you think men and women can work together most effectively (in the church)? Is the way forward to emphasise their similarities, their differences, or both?

12. What gender issues (if any) do you think are most prominent in Westside?

13. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

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